

The impact of rhythm, intonation, and stress on B1 adult english as a foreign language learners' communicative competence development

El impacto del ritmo, la entonación y el acento en el desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa de los estudiantes adultos de inglés como lengua extranjera de nivel B1

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the influence of rhythm, intonation, and stress on the communicative competence of B1 adult English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners at the Language Center of the Catholic University of Cuenca, Ecuador. Likewise, it aims to understand how these three prosodic features affect learners' fluency and comprehension, addressing two primary questions: the overall role of prosodic features in EFL learning and the specific challenges learners face in mastering them. A convergent parallel mixed-method design was employed, and data were collected from seventy-one EFL students and eleven university professors through structured surveys and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal that these prosodic features help develop learners' communicative competence, with intonation identified as the most challenging aspect to learn and master. This study stresses the need for integrating explicit and frequent prosodic instruction into EFL curricula to improve learners' oral proficiency and sheds light on practical pedagogical strategies to address these challenges.

Keywords: Phonetics; Phonology; Speech; Education; Comprehension.

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Resumen

Este estudio pretende investigar la influencia del ritmo, la entonación y el acento en la competencia comunicativa de estudiantes adultos de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL) de nivel B1 en el Centro de Idiomas de la Universidad Católica de Cuenca, Ecuador. Asimismo, se pretende entender cómo estos tres rasgos prosódicos afectan a la fluidez y comprensión de los estudiantes, abordando dos cuestiones principales: el papel general de los rasgos prosódicos en el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera y los retos específicos a los que se enfrentan los estudiantes para dominarlos. Se empleó un diseño metodológico mixto paralelo convergente y se recopilaron datos de setenta y un estudiantes de EFL y once profesores universitarios mediante encuestas estructuradas y entrevistas semiestructuradas. Los resultados revelan que estos rasgos prosódicos contribuyen a desarrollar la competencia comunicativa de los estudiantes, siendo la entonación el aspecto más difícil de aprender y dominar. Este estudio subraya la necesidad de integrar una enseñanza prosódica explícita y frecuente en los planes de estudios de EFL para mejorar la competencia oral de los alumnos y arroja luz sobre estrategias pedagógicas prácticas para abordar estos retos.

Palabras clave: Fonética; Fonología; Discurso; Educación; Comprensión.

Introduction

Rhythm, intonation, and stress are complex and eccentric topics of discussion and study by their very nature; very little is known about them, and it is still ambitious to study them in depth by the EFL teaching community, translating into a vast scarcity in resources (Hirst, 2024), especially for the approach this research intends to cover. Nevertheless, the very few theoretical and practical resources found on this matter revolve around how either of these three prosodic features may or may not have implications in speech but neglect the fundamentals of this research. As a result, its instruction in EFL curricula is often neglected and underemphasized and may vary significantly across different educational programs. This indicates that these prosodic features are essential for effective communication (fluency) and comprehension of English, thus helping learners develop communicative competence (Gilbert et al., 2001; Hirst, 2024). This neglect evokes challenges for EFL learners, causing pronunciation problems and leading to missed opportunities for learners to improve pronunciation to avoid fossilization of errors; in other words, they are key elements for more precise input and output in spoken English (Couper-Kuhlen & Allerton, 1986; Roach, 2010).

Likewise, the implication of rhythm, intonation, and stress in English language acquisition, mainly how their incorporation into the EFL learning process may enhance learners' overall communicative competence, is relevant since these elements ensure that the information is conveyed much more precisely, translating into an active engagement in students' communication attempts (Abdulrahman, 2021; Carley & Mees, 2020; Chomsky & Halle, 1968; Couper-Kuhlen & Allerton, 1986; Roach, 2010).

Previous scholars and studies have also theorized, explored, and analyzed the role of prosody in oral communication development. To align with this research, Couper-Kuhlen and Allerton (1986) and Roach (2010), are key to laying the theoretical foundations as they conceptualize each prosodic feature, as they have considerable influence on research on this particular topic. Alter-

natively, Jackson and O'Brien (2011), set a starting point emphasizing in their study that there is a tendency for both EFL learners and teachers to prioritize clear, comprehensible speech over native-like accents, which highlights the effectiveness of specific training methods for improving pronunciation, focusing –merely– on stress and intonation to pinpoint the importance of setting classroom priorities that enhance speech comprehensibility to succeed in pronunciation training. Nevertheless, this focus on clear speech can inadvertently lead to neglecting prosodic features, which are also pertinent for effective communication.

In light of this, Mohamed (2017) and Yağız et al. (2024), argue that the prevalent paradigm of the scarcity of empirical research exploring this complex but important topic, especially on levels below B2, fails to solve the enigma within the EFL field of communicative contexts per se, and opens the possibility to study this subject in a wide range of EFL levels, directly linked to a further study that delved into the impact of pronunciation on EFL learners' overall communication competence, its relevance regarding language development, and what specific data to collect to obtain the most suitable results (Munro & Derwing, 2019). Their findings revealed that accurate pronunciation regarding prosody and individual sounds is critical to boosting learners' overall oral communication effectiveness. Nonetheless, more research is needed to understand the specific impact of individual prosodic features, particularly at the B1 level.

This lack of research leaves room for several questions in the field, particularly about how these features impact (positively and/or negatively) learners at lower levels (B1, A2, and A1). Accomplishing this requires considerable time, financial resources, and a larger sample to elucidate whether prosodic instruction and practices may facilitate students' oral competence development. Further research in this area would shed light for teachers/instructors to develop materials for meaningful speech training that seamlessly adapts to the B1 learners' specific needs, with special attention to rhythm, intonation, and stress, to try to contribute to filling part of that gap.

To this end, this study analyzed the role of rhythm, intonation, and stress on B1 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) adult learners' communicative competence, aiming to elucidate how prosodic features impact students' oral competence. On these grounds, two specific research questions were posed to conduct this investigation: 1) How do prosodic features impact comprehension and fluency in English? Moreover, 2) What challenges do learners face in mastering English prosody?

This study examined these three prosodic features through the perspectives of B1 adult EFL learners and professors from the Language Center of the Catholic University of Cuenca, Ecuador. A deeper understanding of how prosody affects its learners, focusing on their beliefs regarding the influence of these features on their overall language proficiency and communicative confidence levels. The study seeks to help bridge the gap related to EFL learners' perceptions of the importance of rhythm, intonation, and stress concerning their ability to communicate accurately and effectively.

Literature Review

Two main linguistic theories are decisive for this research: phonetics and phonology, whose primary focus lies in the diverse subfields of the sounds of language processed in a specific and detailed manner, and pragmatics, which intricately deals with the complex interaction of language use and language form, including meaning and context (Carley & Mees, 2020; Chomsky & Halle, 1968; Couper-Kuhlen & Allerton, 1986).

In the case of the study of rhythm, intonation, and stress within the English language system has emerged as a vital component because it directly and significantly affects communicative competence itself for two primary reasons: a) these rules of prosody interplay intricately lead to the timing patterns of a language, yielding, in turn, what is perceived as ‘speech rhythm,’ and b) the establishment of specific stress, which is intricately linked profoundly to the perception of speech rhythm (Roach, 2010).

A few studies have explored the relationship between prosody and oral communication development; nevertheless, it is paramount to highlight that very few in-depth investigations have focused on the perception and production of rhythm, intonation, and stress when each is considered separately. Recently, researchers have placed significant emphasis on rhythm in children, positioning it at the forefront of academic investigation. This wave of research has primarily tinted the distinctions between various rhythmic classes, such as stress-timed, syllable-timed, and mora-timed (Bu & Zhou, 2021; Lee & Song, 2019). Moreover, these studies have indicated that rhythm is not merely an abstract concept but plays a substantial role in the processes involved in language learning and teaching, particularly in practical applications such as pronunciation instruction.

Nevertheless, the form and function of communication are thoroughly discussed in several functionalist approaches to linguistics. For instance, Girsang et al. (2021), suggest that the paralinguistic elements inherent in communication —rhythm, intonation, and stress— do much more than embellish speech; they are necessary for conveying meaning, reflecting the speaker’s attitude, and revealing the speaker’s emotional state. The authors also assert that the paralinguistic characteristics of a person’s voice, namely voice tone, speech speed, and pauses, carry their specific meanings, and should any of these elements be stripped away, any spoken utterance would lose a significant portion of its potential impact (Girsang et al., 2021).

Another theory and research that unfolds as EFL learners walk through the learning process is the phonological transfer, both positive and negative, which significantly influences how they perceive and produce these cues (Chomsky & Halle, 1968; Couper-Kuhlen & Allerton, 1986; Roach, 2010). Fikri (2023), states that while positive transfer (or interference) occurs when similarities between the learner’s native language and English aid in the acquisition of prosodic features, such as recognizing comparable stress patterns, negative transfer arises when differences lead

to misinterpretations or misproductions derived from the learners' native language to English, which is predominantly stress-timed.

In like manner, Roach (2010), explains that rhythm in English is a pattern where stressed syllables occur at regular intervals, distinguishing it from syllable-timed languages like French. The author also mentions that intonation involves pitch variations that convey meaning and emotional nuances, organized into tone units consisting of a "head" and a "tail," and serves functions such as expressing attitudes and emotions and regulating conversation. Lastly, he refers to stress as the relative prominence of syllables, determined by loudness, length, pitch, and quality. He argues that stress placement in English is complex and influenced by several linguistic factors (Roach, 2010).

On a different note, a study by Wang and Mao (2022), reports that the speaker's emotions and states can be reflected through rhythm, intonation, and stress, exemplifying how anger, fear, and storytelling may differ in pitch as each requires a specific register, tempo, and duration to get the message across clearly and accurately. In their research, the authors show that the speech sounds monotonous and lacks emotional depth if the pitch is not correctly placed in each segment of their discourse, concluding that to enhance emotional expressiveness, English learners would benefit from targeted training in prosodic features and activities that encourage imitation of native speakers' prosodic patterns (Wang & Mao, 2022). The latter concurs with Hirst's (2024), claims on prosody meaning, emotions, attitudes, and discourse functions conveyance and influencing the interpretation of utterances.

Lastly, Jackson and O'Brien (2011), propose that L1 prosodic transfer is a key factor in L2 learning, with substantial implications for communicative competence and comprehensibility. This research demonstrates that L1 (negative) prosodic transfer exerts a more noteworthy influence, potentially impeding intelligibility when speaking (Jackson & O'Brien, 2011). These findings stress the need for integrating explicit prosodic instruction in EFL pedagogy to enhance learners' communicative competence.

Methodology

Study Design

This study was based on a convergent parallel mixed-method design since it offers a robust methodological approach for comprehensive research investigations. It employed quantitative and qualitative research paradigms integrating interviews and surveys (qualitative and quantitative, respectively) to allow for a multi-angled understanding of phenomena beyond the limitations of singular methodological approaches (Cresswell, 2009).

Kothari (2004), asserts that this strategy is intended to lead to a more refined analytical framework that captures breadth through systematic pattern identification and depth using rich, individualized, experiential insights, thereby enhancing the primary inquiry's validity and comprehensiveness. Furthermore, the author asserts that the inherent strength of this approach lies in its ability to corroborate findings across different methodological scopes, providing a more holistic and nuanced interpretation of research questions (Kothari, 2004).

Setting and Participants

This study was conducted in a private English language institute, a branch of a private university in Cuenca, Ecuador. With approximately 1,500 students, this institution offers its undergraduates instructional English programs ranging from A1 to B1, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2020).

The sample of this research consisted of seventy-one male and female EFL students and eleven male and female professors from the same institution. On the one hand, the students' age range was between 20 and 25 years; their EFL proficiency level was B1, and the class hours they received were six per week (twice a week, three hours every other day). The professors were between 30 and 40 years old with a degree in English literature and over 10 to 15 years of teaching experience. Moreover, all professors hold a Master's degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and an English proficiency level between B2 and C1, according to the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2020).

Instruments

On the one hand, this study collected quantitative data from professors' and students' surveys. The professors' survey contained eight questions in English: four multiple-choice, one with an eight-item Likert scale based on a scale from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree" per item, and four open-ended questions to assess perceptions of prosody's role and challenges their students face. These four open-ended questions were added to complement the quantitative instrument since professors do not have enough time to sit for an individual interview or focus group. Conversely, the students' survey contained five questions in Spanish for the transparency of the results: three multiple-choice and one nine-item Likert scale also based on a scale from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree" per item, intended to assess students' perceptions of the role of prosody and challenges. The items and indicators were later translated for their tabulation within this research.

On the other hand, this study collected qualitative data via audio from six students' semi-structured interviews in Spanish (later transcribed, translated, and coded) to obtain their insights on the matter and complement the survey results. This interview consisted of six questions, and it was also used to analyze the impact of prosodic features on EFL learners' discourse. It is

worth mentioning that this instrument was purposely made for this specific sample in this particular study.

Procedure

This research was developed in two main phases. The first phase entailed data collection, specifically, surveys of students and professors. To do so, a consent form for data gathering was applied to all seventy-one students and the eleven professors, respectively, and the interviews were conducted immediately after to have both qualitative and quantitative results. The second phase consisted of tabulating and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data to address the research questions adequately. The quantitative analysis was processed using descriptive analytics through *Jamovi* software. In contrast, the qualitative study was coded based on the chunk of text extracted from the interview transcripts and the professors' open-ended questions.

Results

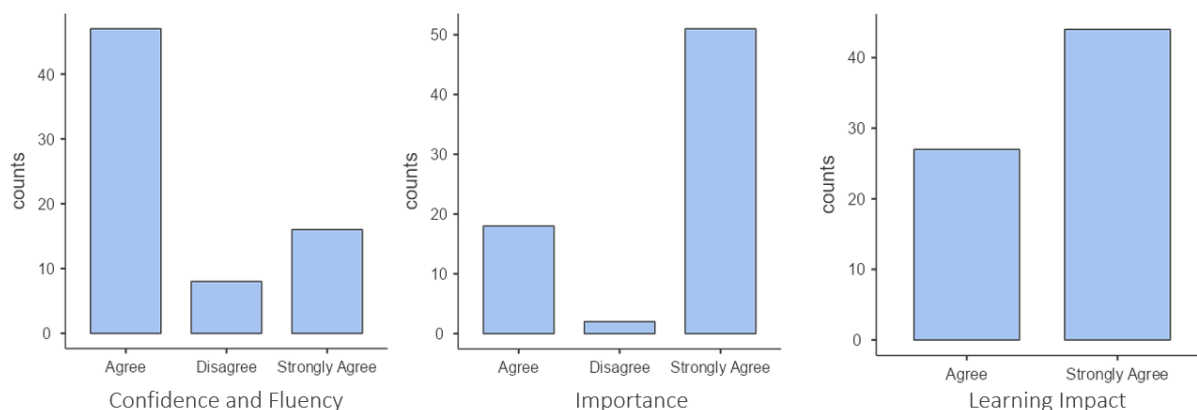
This section presents the findings from two surveys administered to seventy-one students and eleven university professors to understand their beliefs/perceptions regarding how prosodic features impact comprehension and fluency in English and the challenges learners face in mastering English prosody. The data addresses the perceived impact of prosody on confidence and fluency, its importance, and the challenges learners face in mastering these features. This section is divided into two subsections: *Quantitative results*, with the students' and professors' results reported separately within the same subsection, and *Qualitative results* reported likewise.

Quantitative Results

Students' Survey: Confidence and Fluency, Importance, and Learning Impact

Most respondents reached a consensus, agreeing on expressed confidence when including the prosodic features of rhythm, intonation, and stress in their speech. Furthermore, most respondents also agreed with the importance of rhythm, intonation, and stress for practical spoken English, whereas a minority disagreed (2.8%). In line with this, most respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that learning these features helped them speak and understand English better (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Students' perceptions of confidence and fluency, importance, and learning impact of prosodic features

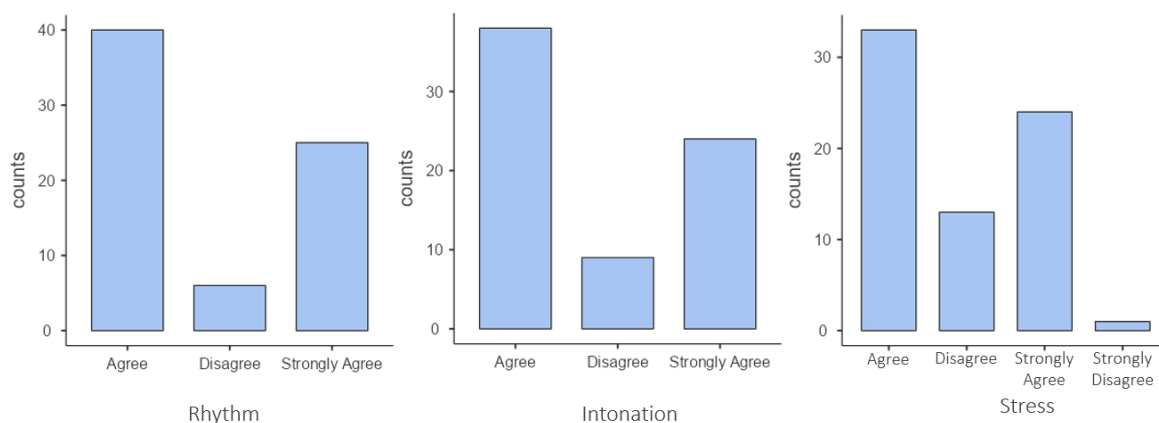


Source: own elaboration

Challenges in Mastering Prosody

The survey also explored the specific challenges learners encounter with different prosodic features. As for *rhythm*, the vast majority of respondents agreed that they found it challenging to learn and apply, and 8.5% disagreed on this matter; *intonation*, with most respondents agreeing with the same indicator, whereas 12.7% disagreed; and finally, *stress*, with an overall agreement and a 19.7% of disagreement (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Students' perceptions of challenges in mastering prosody

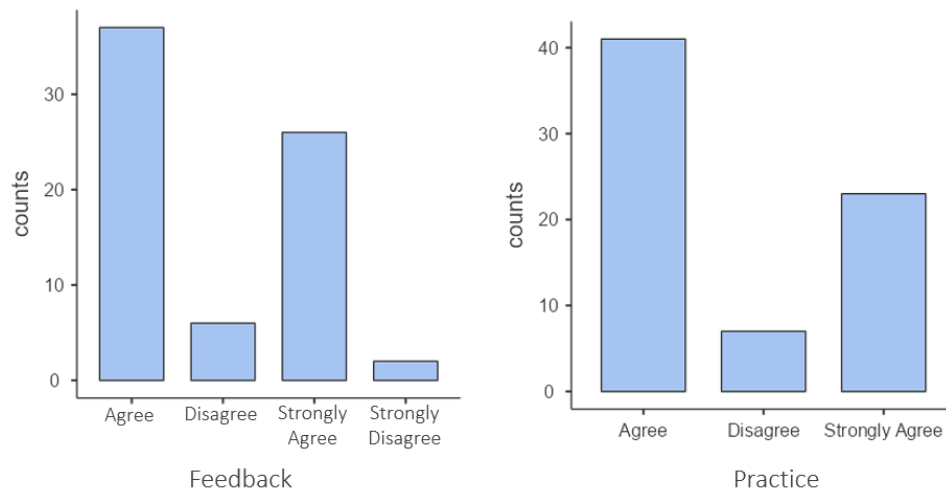


Source: own elaboration

Feedback and Practice

Learners' perceptions regarding feedback and practice opportunities were also examined. While a majority agreed they felt they received sufficient feedback on prosody, a minority indicated otherwise (8.5% disagreed, 2.8% strongly disagreed). Similarly, while most respondents concurred they had enough practice, a minority did not (10% disagreed) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Students' perceptions of feedback and practice

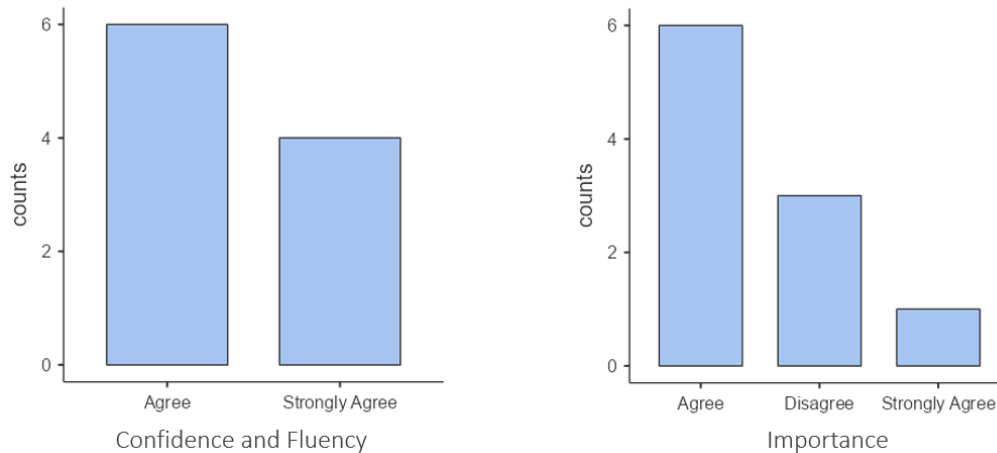


Source: own elaboration

Professors' Survey: Student Confidence and Fluency and Importance

Professors' perceptions of the impact on student confidence and fluency showed that all respondents concurred that teaching rhythm, intonation, and stress helps students feel more confident and fluent in English (see Figure 4). As per its importance, most professors agreed that they consistently and directly taught rhythm, intonation, and stress as a core in their English classes. In contrast, three-tenths of respondents disagreed with this statement (30%) (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Illustrates the data from confidence and fluency, importance



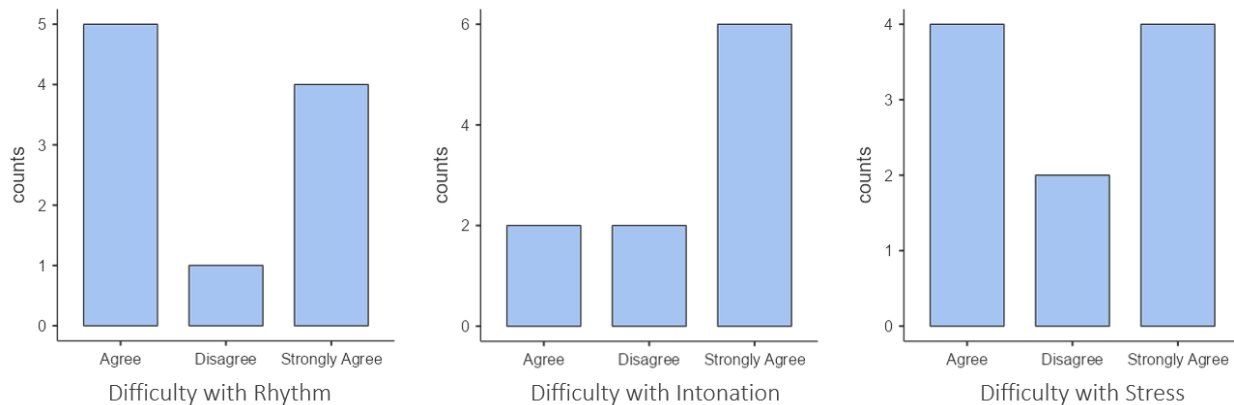
Source: own elaboration

Challenges in Mastering Prosody

Professors' surveys revealed insights into how their students perceived difficulties with prosodic features. Regarding *rhythm*, most professors agreed that this feature is complex for their students, and a minority disagreed. For *intonation*, most agreed, and 20% disagreed that students

experience difficulty; for *stress*, most agreed and 20% disagreed that it is difficult for their students (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Professors' perceptions of difficulty with rhythm, intonation, and stress



Source: own elaboration

Qualitative Results

Students' semistructured interviews

This subsection reports the coded results from the six students' semistructured interviews, which focused on their challenges, the importance of prosodic features, prosodic instruction, confidence, and practice.

On the one hand, most learners found English pronunciation challenging, mentioning soundwise differences from their L1 (Spanish) versus the complexity of English sounds. Furthermore, they recognized the importance of prosodic features (rhythm, intonation, and stress) for clarity and conveying meaning and emotions when speaking. Four students identified *intonation* as the most difficult prosodic feature, followed by stress and rhythm. While two students felt prosody helped them express emotions, the other four partially developed this skill.

Conversely, instruction on prosody was perceived as insufficient, often limited to corrections or occasional tips rather than comprehensive lessons due to the lack of instruction time. Moreover, confidence in speaking was linked to prosodic competence, with three of the six students feeling more confident when using rhythm and intonation, while the other three remained nervous. Lastly, a common sentiment among all six students was the need for more focused practice on prosody during class, with suggestions for improvement, more focused listening exercises, recordings and analysis from movie extracts, more explicit linguistic rules, and real-world conversation simulations.

Professors' open-ended questions

This subsection reports professors' answers to open-ended questions applied in the survey to complement their perception, definition, and knowledge of these three prosodic features, their

importance, instruction activities, and suggested changes in prosody instruction in their institution.

In this context, professors provided various definitions of prosodic features based on their definitions and knowledge of prosody. *Rhythm* was commonly described as the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables, *intonation* as the rise and fall of voice pitch, and emphasis on syllables or words. Nine out of eleven professors recognized the integrated nature of these elements, remarking how they work together to convey meaning and emotions.

Likewise, all professors stated the importance of rhythm, intonation, and stress for developing students' fluency and communicative competence. The most frequently alluded reasons included enhancing meaning and clarity, fostering naturalness and fluency, and enabling effective emotional expression, whereas other reasons included improving pronunciation and sound recognition.

The reported instructional activities regarding prosody varied. Eight out of eleven professors relied on book and audio materials, while three incorporated activities like clapping, shadowing, question-answer exchanges, dialogue reading, echoing questions, and recordings with feedback. Seven professors mentioned using songs, visual aids, repetition, role-plays, and drills, and four professors explicitly stated that they do not teach prosody.

Concerning suggested changes in prosody instruction in their institution, professors offered suggestions for improving prosody instruction, such as the need for more diverse activities and readily accessible resources, the importance of using authentic materials and contextualizing prosody instruction within real-life scenarios. It was also suggested that more dynamic and interactive activities be incorporated, practice time be increased, more personalized feedback be provided, and dedicated prosody classes be created since they are nonexistent. In like manner, five of the eleven professors mentioned the potential benefits of using recordings for self-assessment.

Discussion

This section interprets the study findings and discusses their implications for the research question: the influence of rhythm, intonation, and stress on the communicative competence of EFL learners.

Implications

Study Implications

This research yields significant pedagogical and curricular implications. On the one hand, the findings could help the current empirical research gap regarding the role of prosody below the B2 level, particularly in Ecuadorian EFL contexts. Likewise, the results may provide insights

for regularly integrating rhythm, intonation, and stress instruction in EFL programs, intended to help emphasize teaching prosodic features and potentially guide future curriculum revisions.

Furthermore, identifying specific learner challenges –particularly those stemming from L1 transfer and cultural differences– could provide a foundation for developing targeted interventions. These findings could also suggest future research directions, especially in examining the long-term effects of prosodic instruction across varying proficiency levels. This could help enhance the theoretical understanding of prosody’s role in English language acquisition and practical applications in EFL classroom settings.

Implication of Findings

The results from this study reinforce the argument that prosodic features (rhythm, intonation, and stress) play a key role in B1 adult EFL learners’ communicative competence development. Both the quantitative and qualitative data confirmed a consensus among students and professors regarding the impact of prosody on fluency and comprehension, which means that using those specific prosodic features helps develop learners’ communicative competence and that the challenge students and professors face lies in understanding, learning, and including rhythm, intonation, and stress into their speech routine. These findings align with previous research, including the works of (Li, 2023; Šimáčková & Podlipský, 2023; Sonia & Lotfi, 2016), as well as with the theoretical support of Chomsky and Halle (1968), Couper-Kuhlen and Allerton (1986), (Roach, 2010), and Munro and Derwing (2019), which establish the importance of prosodic features to enhance spoken language skills and preventing fossilization of errors.

Most learners acknowledged that rhythm, intonation, and stress in their speech improved their fluency and comprehension, corroborating research by Abdulrahman (2021) and Carley and Mees (2020), who emphasize that a lack of prosodic awareness hinders oral communication and leads to message misinterpretation. Nonetheless, the current study revealed that students perceived intonation as the most challenging prosodic feature to learn and apply, followed by stress and rhythm. This observation differs from other research in the field since most of the studies have been conducted on *stress*, just like Bu and Zhou (2021), who reported that acquiring English stress is particularly difficult for non-native speakers due to its language-specific, intricate nature.

Implications for Teaching Practices

The findings pinpoint the need for more structured and explicit instruction in prosody within EFL curricula in the Language Center of the Catholic University of Cuenca, Ecuador. For instance, professors suggested integrating more interactive and authentic materials, such as role-plays, shadowing exercises, and real-world conversation simulations, to enhance learners’ pro-

sodic awareness. Likewise, self-assessment and co-assessment through recordings could improve learners' ability to monitor and refine their pronunciation, especially in the prosodic field.

Furthermore, the results suggest that rhythm, intonation, and stress should not be treated as auxiliary elements in speech training but as fundamental components of communicative competence. As Roach (2010), argues, speech rhythm and stress patterns influence intelligibility significantly, which supports the need for explicit and frequent, systematic instruction in these areas.

Comparisons with Previous Studies

While much of the existing literature focuses on higher proficiency levels (B2 and C1), this study addressed specific challenges faced by a specific group of learners on a particular level: B1. Munro and Derwing (2019), highlight the need for more research on the impact of pronunciation and prosodic features at lower proficiency levels, and this study contributes by identifying specific struggles with prosodic features in an Ecuadorian EFL setting. Additionally, the study confirms that learners' difficulties in mastering rhythm, intonation, and stress are influenced by L1 prosodic transfer, as noted by Jackson and O'Brien (2011).

Lastly, the finding that many students struggle with intonation echoes Wang and Mao's (2022), research, which underlines how intonation directly affects emotional expressiveness and meaning in English speech. Moreover, this study supports the argument that Mohamed (2017) and Yağız et al. (2024), present, which states that insufficient empirical research on prosody at lower proficiency levels leads to inadequate instructional strategies. This study suggests that targeted training in prosodic features should be explicitly incorporated into language curricula, aligning with pedagogical recommendations as asserted by Gilbert et al. (2001).

Limitations

Several limitations were identified in this study. Firstly, the sample size was limited, and this may translate into affecting the generalizability of the findings at the Language Center of the Catholic University of Cuenca, as the results may not represent all B1 adult EFL learners within this institution, nor all different contexts or institutions in Ecuador. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data from surveys and interviews hosts potential preconceived notions, namely subjectivity, as well as recall and social desirability bias. Moreover, participants' responses might have been influenced by their emotional perceptions at the moment of the survey and interview, theoretical construct inaccuracies, or the desire to provide socially acceptable answers, which can affect the precision and objectivity of the data.

Secondly, the mixed-method design also presents challenges in seamlessly integrating qualitative and quantitative data because combining these data types could lead to difficulties in drawing consistent conclusions, potentially impacting the overall validity of the findings. Moreo-

ver, the study was conducted within a limited timeframe, restricting the data collection and analysis depth. In light of this, a more extended study period could have provided more comprehensive insights and allowed for longitudinal analysis of the impact of prosodic features on communicative competence.

Lastly, the lack of financial resources and sponsorship also constrained the scope of the study. Thus, adequate funding could have facilitated a larger sample size, more diverse data collection methods, and the inclusion of additional variables, thereby enhancing the vigor of the research. In addition, there was a scarcity of empirical research explicitly focusing on the impact of prosodic features on B1-level EFL learners and the challenges they face when learning, applying, and mastering these features. This made it difficult to compare findings and situate the study within a broader academic context, so more research is needed to build a further comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Guidelines for Future Research

This study leaves enough room for further research on prosodic instruction at different proficiency levels and its effects on learners, professors, and teachers. Future studies could explore the effectiveness of specific training methods, such as contrastive analysis between L1 and L2 prosody, or investigate how prosody instruction influences learners' motivation and confidence in oral communication; it could provide more insight into curriculum development.

Conclusion

The findings of this study feature the role of rhythm, intonation, and stress in developing communicative competence among B1 adult EFL learners. These prosodic features impact fluency and comprehension, highlighting the need for integrating structured prosodic instruction into EFL curricula. Despite recognizing the relevance of prosody, learners continued to face challenges in mastering these features due to insufficient explicit instruction. Likewise, many students rely on spontaneous feedback rather than systematic training, which hinders their progress. Thus, targeted instructional strategies, such as interactive and contextualized practice, can help bridge this gap and improve learning outcomes in the long run.

Alternatively, professors also require further training and resources to effectively teach prosody. While some professors include prosodic elements in their lessons, a more structured and research-informed approach is necessary to ensure consistency and effectiveness in instruction. Institutions should consider professional development programs focused on prosodic pedagogy to enhance teaching practices. These findings suggest that integrating diverse instructional methods, such as real-world conversation simulations and self-assessment tools, can further support learners in developing prosodic competence. Providing ample structured practice and feedback opportunities is important for improving their confidence and communicative abilities.

Nonetheless, this study has limitations. The sample size was limited to a single institution, restricting the generalizability of findings to other EFL contexts. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data introduces potential biases, and the study timeframe constrained the depth of data collection. Future research should explore longitudinal approaches to assess the sustained impact of prosodic training and expand the investigation to different proficiency levels and learning environments. In light of this, further studies should also examine: 1) the effectiveness of technology-assisted prosodic training, particularly through digital tools and speech analysis applications, and 2) how L1 interference affects prosodic acquisition in EFL learners could provide valuable insights for refining teaching strategies.

Conclusively, improving prosodic instruction in EFL settings requires a multidimensional approach involving structured pedagogy, enhanced professor training, and diverse practice opportunities, but professors/instructors could better support learners in developing their communicative competence and achieving greater fluency and accuracy in spoken English if all of the above is included regularly.

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