

# The Level of English Oral Reading Fluency among Abot – Alam Secondary Learners

Jane Charity A. Estrada<sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Education – Division of Ozamiz City, Ozamiz City National High School, Ozamiz City, Misamis Occidental, Northern Mindanao, Philippines

\*Correspondence: Department of Education – Division of Ozamiz City, Ozamiz City National High School, Ozamiz City, Misamis Occidental, Northern Mindanao, Philippines. Tel: 63-926-314-0396 E-mail: estrada.janecharity@gmail.com

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## Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the oral reading fluency level of the Abot – Alam learners in reading. This was also conducted to explore whether there is any significant difference in the learners' English oral fluency based on their profiles such as age, gender, and their highest educational attainment. Eighteen Abot – Alam learners enrolled under the Alternative Learning System (ALS) in Brgy. Tinago, Ozamiz City answered a questionnaire and a checklist; read a standardized oral paragraph as measuring instruments. Generally, the results showed that the participants have instructional level of fluency in reading grade –level English texts and that there was a moderate positive correlation between the learners' English oral fluency and their age. However, there were no significant differences in their oral fluency level and their gender and year level.

**Keywords:** *language fluency; dropouts; ESL context; ALS; Filipino learners*

## 1. Introduction

Reading is the primary tool for learning. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (1983) describes it as “the means by which literate persons can gain access to the vast and varied supply of knowledge and experiences that has been preserved in written form” (p. 9).

Reading can be used to fulfill many purposes. It is used to meet practical personal, social, socio-civic demands of daily living. It helps further avocational interests, carry on and promote professional studies. Reading strictly satiates intellectual demands, spiritual needs or immediate personal value (Gray & Rogers, 1956). It can serve as a vehicle for self-improvement, as well as extension of cultural background. Most significantly, reading is used to acquire information. Readers read to seek answers to questions so they read to satisfy their curiosity (Harvey, 1998).

Moreover, reading, according to the National Council of Teachers of English (2006), is a complex process. It involves a series of cognitive processing (Morrow & Tracey, 2012). It indicates that many strategies must be developed for successful reading. For students in the secondary level, these strategies include word reading or decoding, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension (Bryan et al., 2007). However, researchers have established that oral reading fluency is a reliable predictor of reading proficiency (Fuchs et al., 2001; Simmons et al., 2008). It is acknowledged to be the valid measure of a student's general reading skill (Rasinski, 2010).

The National Reading Panel Report (2000) defines oral reading fluency as the ability to “read text with speed, accuracy, and proper expression”. It is a level of accuracy and rate where decoding is relatively effortless, oral reading is smooth and accurate with correct prosody, and attention can be allocated to comprehension (Wolf & Katzir-Cohen, 2001). Specifically, oral fluency refers to the accuracy and rate at which students expressively read a grade level text (Francis et al., 2008; Harn et al., 2008; Hasbrouck & Tindal, 2006; Jenkins et al., 2007; Katzir et al., 2006).

Oral fluency is multifaceted. Nonetheless, it is frequently described in studies as having three major dimensions: (1) word reading accuracy, (2) automaticity or word reading rate or pace, and (3) prosody (Rasinski, 2010). Word

reading accuracy requires readers to sound out the words in a text with negligible errors. This dimension refers to phonics skills and other strategies for decoding words. Automaticity, on the other hand, refers to instant processing of texts. The theory of automatic information processing in reading by La Berge and Samuel (1974) argued that the surface-level processing of words in reading involving visual perception, sounding, phrasing words together, etc. must ideally be done at an automatic level, one which requires least attention or cognitive capacity. In so doing, readers can reserve their finite cognitive resources for meaning making – comprehension.

Prosody, the third major dimension of oral fluency, is the appropriate use of phrasing and expression to convey meaning to the words implied through emphasis, and intonation. It is the capacity to make oral reading sound like spoken language (Stahl & Kuhn, 2002). It is the melodic element in reading (Rasinski et al., 2009) and the bridge to comprehension (Pikulski & Chard, 2005; Rasinski, 2010; Schreiber, 1991). When readers read easily and accurately but without expression in their voices, when they place equal emphasis on every word but have no sense of phrasing, and when they ignore most punctuation, then it is unlikely that they will fully understand the text (Rasinski, 2004).

Oral fluency is indeed very significant. When learners are frequently exposed to read-alouds, they learn context, pacing, inflection, pronunciation, the sheer beauty of language. They learn to visualize the story and begin to appreciate the power behind language used and expressed purposefully, cogently, and correctly. Fluency expands vocabulary development, context awareness, and recognition of audience, tone, purpose. (Punsalan, 2006)

Furthermore, the reader's oral fluency and over-all reading proficiency level can be independent, instructional, or frustration. The University of Utah Reading Clinic (2015) describes frustration level, the lowest level, as that which requires extensive assistance from an educator. It is when the passage is too difficult for a learner to read, and little or no learning will take place. The instructional level is one at which the text can be read by the learner, but with some teacher guidance and instruction to aid content comprehension. This is the level where readers have adequate background knowledge for a topic, and can access text quickly and with no or few errors. This is the most important level where learning rightly transpires. The independent level is one at which a learner can read the passage comfortably and easily and without any teacher assistance or guidance at all.

It is a shared view by several researchers and language teachers that oral fluency is the gateway to over-all proficiency in reading (Levasseur, et al., 2006). The level of verbal reading proficiency has a 30-year evidence base as one of the most common, reliable, and efficient indicator of student reading comprehension (Reschly, Busch, Betts, Deno, & Long, 2009; Wayman, Wallace, Wiley, Tichá, & Espin, 2007 as cited in Rasplca & Cummings, 2013). It is estimated that 75 to 90 percent of students who struggle in comprehension have reading fluency problems that significantly cause their comprehension difficulty (Duke, Pressley, & Hilden, 2004). Additionally, in the study done by Daane, Campbell, Grigg, Goodman, & Orange (2005), reading fluency proved to be significantly related to overall reading achievement for students beyond the primary grades, and a significant number of these students lack even basic reading fluency skills. In a recent study of fluency among high school students in an urban school district, it was found that fluency was strongly associated with students' performance on the high school graduation test and that over half of the students assessed could be considered disfluent (Rasinski, Padak, McKeon, Krug-Wilfong, Friedauer, & Heim, 2005). Fluency is therefore an issue not only for younger students but older students as well especially among students from less advantaged backgrounds (Rasinski, 2006).

Highlighting the study on oral reading fluency among learners is very essential. The knowledge on it will give reading teachers and parents the preliminary information if the students can efficiently read or not. It can guide teachers in their instruction. It will help instructional material designers create and teachers select tasks that cater fluency development. It will also serve as the basis for intervention or enrichment programs for reading teachers and administrators. Lastly, studying the level of oral fluency among Abot – Alam learners under the Alternative Learning System will and extend to the limited literature available.

### *1.1 Objectives of the Study*

This study aimed at investigating the Abot – Alam secondary learners' oral fluency in English. Most specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

- a. identify the profile of the Abot – Alam learners
  1. name the factors causing the learners' school leaving
- b. determine the level of English oral reading fluency among Abot – Alam learners in terms of Expression and Volume, Phrasing, Smoothness, and Pace

- c. explore the significant relationship of learners' demographic profile and their level of oral fluency in English

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Design

The design of this study is descriptive - quantitative in nature. A standardized oral test, a questionnaire, checklist and a scale were employed as measuring tools. The participants were required to answer all the items in the questionnaire and checklist truthfully. They were also asked to read standardized reading passages orally.

### 2.2 Respondents

The sample in this study involved the Abot – Alam Secondary learners currently enrolled under the Abot – Alam program of the Alternative Learning System of Brgy. Tinago, Ozamiz City. They are 15 to 30 year old out- of-school youth and adults who have been dropped – out from the formal schools for some personal, financial, or academic issues. They have not yet earned a secondary credential. The total number of learners was eighteen with (6) males and (12) females. They composed the respondents of the study.

### 2.3 Research Setting

The research was conducted at the ALS Training Center of Brgy. Tinago, Ozamiz City. It is situated at Ostia Ave., Tinago, Ozamiz City. At present, it is composed of one Abot – Alam teacher.

### 2.4 Instrument

There were four (4) instruments utilized in the study: Profile Survey Questionnaire, Factors of School Drop-Out Checklist, Gray's Standardized Oral Reading Paragraphs, and a Multidimensional Fluency Scale.

The Profile Survey Questionnaire has four (4) items which were used to collect information regarding the learners' demographic background. It identified the respondents' age, gender, educational attainment, and their work. The second tool used was the Factors of School Drop-Out Checklist. It listed thirteen (13) school – related, five (5) family – related, one (1) peer – related, three (3) employment – related reasons of dropping out. Respondents were to check the causes of their drop – out and identify other related reasons not listed in the questionnaire.

The third instrument used was Gray's Oral Reading Paragraphs. The adapted instrument was a standardized reading tool prepared by Dr. William S. Gray (1963), a founding member and the first president of the International Reading Association. The instrument is a series of 12 paragraphs with an increasing level of difficulty. It is intended for 3<sup>rd</sup> graders to 12<sup>th</sup> graders and was designed to measure oral reading abilities (i.e., Rate, Accuracy, Fluency, and Comprehension) of students. The Flesch Reading Ease Readability Formula was also used to determine the reading levels of the paragraphs. For the purpose of attaining the objectives under study, only five sets of passages were employed. These paragraphs were fitting to the year level the respondents have last attended.

Lastly, a multidimensional fluency scale was used to rate the learner's oral reading performance. It is a rubric developed by Zutell & Rasinski (1991) which evaluates reader fluency in the areas of expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness, and pace. A score of '4', '3', '2', and '1' were given to each dimension depending on the degree of fluency. The grant score was used to interpret the oral reading fluency level of the individual using the following continuum: 4.00 – 8.00 frustration level, 8.01 – 12.00 instructional level, and 12.01 – 16.00 independent level. For analyzing the dimensions of oral fluency, the following continuum was used: 1. 00 – 2.00 frustration level; 2.01 – 3.00 instructional level; 3.01 – 4.00 independent level.

### 2.5 Reliability and Validity

To investigate the reliability of the standardized instrument, each paragraph was scored using the Flesch Reading Ease Readability Formula. The reading ease and the accuracy and appropriateness of the paragraphs in terms of the year level were as follows: a) Paragraph 1, Flesch-Kincaid reading ease is 73% and the grade level is Grade 6 b) Paragraph 2, Flesch-Kincaid reading ease is 80.8% and the grade level is Grade 7 c) Paragraph 3, Flesch-Kincaid reading ease is 68.8% and the grade level is Grade 8 d) Paragraph 4, Flesch-Kincaid reading ease is 52.9% and the grade level is Grade 9 and e) Paragraph 5, Flesch-Kincaid reading ease is 41.2% and the grade level is Grade 10.

To ensure the validity of the reading tool used, it was given to one Abot – Alam English teacher of Brgy. Aguada Ozamiz City. Her comments were taken into consideration and she advocated that the items of the questionnaire are valid and reliable to investigate the research objectives. She further noted that face validity is established. The

composition of the passages reflected general interest, controlled syntactic structure, and age and grade appropriate vocabulary.

### *2.6 Data Collection*

The following were the steps undertaken in gathering the data:

1. Permission was asked from the Education Program Specialists in ALS in the Division of Ozamiz City for the test administration.
2. Respondents were asked to answer the Profile Survey Questionnaire and Factors of School Drop-Out Checklist
3. Respondents were then explained on the rubric to be used.
4. Respondents were instructed to stand, read a standardized oral reading paragraph one by one.
  - a. The researcher and the rater, who is also an Abot – Alam English teacher used a multidimensional fluency rubric in evaluating the reading performance.
5. Scores were then recorded and analyzed.

### *2.7 Ethical Consideration*

Before administering the test, the respondents were briefed on the goals of the study. To ensure better and valid results, the respondents were informed that their answers would be treated with complete confidentiality. Moreover, ethical issues related to the culture and nature of the respondents and the policy of the environment were taken into consideration.

### *2.8 Data Analysis*

The collected data were processed using the MS Office Excel Program and were analyzed through Minitab Statistical Software version 16. Descriptive statistics were used to answer the research questions and were expressed in terms of Frequency, Percentage, Mean Values. In analyzing the relationship of the variables involved, Spearman Rho Correlation was utilized. The findings are indicated in the next section.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### *3.1 Profile of the Abot – Alam Learners*

Eighteen (18) learners were involved in the study. They were once out – of – school youths and adults who are currently enrolled in the Abot – Alam Program of the Alternative Learning System. Six of them were males and twelve were females. Girls are indeed more likely to persistently continue studying than boys. The same statistical analysis from the Philippine Women Commission (2014), also showed that enrolment and completion rates for SY 2010-2011 was higher in girls than in boys.

Most of the respondents were in their early adulthood whose age range from 21 years old and above (44.44%). There were six 15 – 17 years old learners (33.33%) and four 18 – 20 (22.22%) adolescents who composed the total population. As can be seen in table 1, half of the total number of respondents were able to reach 3<sup>rd</sup> year in high school. Others were able to enter 1<sup>st</sup> year high school (16.67%). There were also those who already reached 2<sup>nd</sup> year and 4<sup>th</sup> year but soon dropped out (11.11%). Two respondents also graduated in Grade – Six and stopped schooling (11.11%). These respondents are just few of the millions of Filipinos who have been out – of – school.

**Table 1.** Abot – Alam Learners’ Demographic Profile (n=18)

Profile	Frequency	Percent
AGE:		
15 – 17 years old	6	33.33 %
18 – 20 years old	4	22.22 %
21 years old & above	8	44.44 %
Missing System	-	
Total	18	100 %
GENDER:		
Male	6	33.33%
Female	12	66.67%
Missing System	-	
Total	18	100%
YEAR LEVEL:		
1 <sup>st</sup> Year	3	16.67%
2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	2	11.11 %
3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	9	50.00%
4 <sup>th</sup> Year	2	11.11 %
Elementary Graduate	2	11.11 %
Missing System	-	
Total	18	100%

Unfortunately, the school dropout rate (12%) in Mindanao is the highest in the Philippines, compared with 6.5% nationally (Vignoles, 2008). As revealed by the students themselves, their dropping out of school can be traced to numerous reasons. Table 2 presents the frequency of the causes of dropping out by the respondents. Nine of them left school because of the need to support their families. They had to get a job to augment the family income, even sacrificing their education in the process. Others had to earn a living so they could have *baon* (allowance) to school and they could pay for their requirements and projects. This substantiates the earlier findings of Barton (2006) that poverty is the primary cause of school leaving. However, given the lack of education as the precarious situation that caused poverty, the OSY phenomenon continues to occur among the poor (Abao, Apao & Dayagbil, 2014).

Additionally, five of the respondents stopped studying because of frequent absenteeism. While others reported that they incurred several absences because they had to do household chores and even had to go fishing with their fathers, four explained that they just didn't find studying interesting. Accounts from FLEMSS Study of the National Statistics Office (2003) showed that lack of interest is the topmost cause of school leaving (71% among males; 23.9% among females). Also, four of the respondents dropped school because of being influenced by peers. They confirmed that their *barkada* (peers) persuaded them to play online computer games until they got addicted to it and soon forgot about the value of their education. This finding concurs with that of a study by Ballo-Alzate (2007). Peer pressure played a critical role in what adolescents did and did not do. It is characteristic of several high school dropouts from urban areas. Adolescent students could be easily swayed by their peers, some of them sacrificing their schooling in order to be accepted (Nava, 2009).

Two of the respondents dropped out because they planned to get married. One stopped schooling because she could not keep up with schoolwork and another could not get along with his teachers. Similarly, Boholano & Go Puco's (2013) study on 292 students in Cebu, Philippines showed that more than one-half of the children (168; 57.5%) indicated that they did not like their teacher, which could be interpreted as a practical reason to lose interest in studying.

School leaving has become a global concern. The rising number of young Filipinos uneducated, alongside the fulfilment of the EFA (Education For All) Goals 2015 has significantly prompted the government through the Department of Education to implement the Abot-Alam Program thru DepEd Order No. 17, s. 2014 to locate those who have not completed basic and higher education (aged 15-30) and enroll them in appropriate program interventions in education, entrepreneurship, and employment to improve the quality of their lives.

**Table 2.** Frequency of Factors of School Dropout among Abot – Alam Learners

Factors	Frequency
<b>School-related reasons:</b>	
1. Had many absences	5
2. Was getting poor grades/failing school	1
3. Did not like school	0
4. Could not keep up with schoolwork	1
5. Thought could not complete school requirements	0
6. Could not get along with teachers	1
7. Did not feel belong there	0
8. Could not get along with others	0
9. Was suspended	0
10. Changed schools and did not like new one	0
11. Lack of interest	4
12. Did not feel safe	0
13. Was expelled	0
<b>Family-related reasons:</b>	
14. Was Pregnant	0
15. Had to support family	9
16. Had to care for a member of the family	0
17. Became a father/mother of a baby	0
18. Married or planned to get married	2
<b>Employment-related reasons:</b>	
19. Got a job	7
20. Could not work at same time	0
<b>Peer-related reasons:</b>	
21. Influenced by friends	4
<b>Others: 22. Computer Addiction</b>	3

### 3.2 General Oral Fluency Level of Abot – Alam Learners in English

The Abot –Alam Secondary learners' over-all level of oral fluency in English is instructional. The result of the descriptive analysis shows that the overall mean score among the participants is 10.19 (SD = 2.340) as seen in Table 3. This result reveals that the participants have instructional reading level in terms of accuracy, expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness, and pace as interpreted using the continuum below Table 3. This finding contrasts the result of the study by Rasinski, Padak, McKeon, Krug-Wilfong, Friedauer, & Heim (2005) wherein the high school students they assessed were considered disfluent.

It is a notable result that students who were previously school dropouts were still able to read instructionally. This mirrors the effectiveness done by their former reading teachers and the present one as well in shaping them to become able readers who need less scaffolding. The text for them may be challenging but manageable. They were able to read with 90 % precision even though there were a few times that they had to stop out of confusion on how to correctly read words. They managed to orally decode with a mixture of moderately fast and slow pacing, and with good prosody.

High school students are already expected to read fluently and accurately (Bryan et al., 2007). It is therefore fitting for the reading teacher to continue providing them with reading materials suitable for their needs and grade level and

then move to more complex reading texts and those that actually cater to their areas of interest. These can provide avenues for the learners to grow from being an instructional reader to becoming an independent one.

**Table 3.** Abot – Alam Learners’ General Oral Fluency Level

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Dev.	Interpretation
Oral Reading Fluency	18	6.000	16.000	<b>10.194</b>	2.340	<b>Instructional Level</b>

Note: 4.00 – 8.00 frustration level; 8.01 – 12.00 instructional level; 12.01 – 16.00 independent level

*a. The Oral Fluency of Abot – Alam learners in terms of Accuracy, Expression and Volume, Phrasing, Smoothness, and Pace*

As shown in Table 4, the level of accuracy, expression and volume among readers is represented by mean score 2.417 (SD = 0.772). That is, the participants have instructional level of fluency in terms of accuracy, expression and volume. The results prove that the learners can read with only 1 – 10 % errors. They make text sound like natural language in some areas of the passage. Voice volume is appropriate and they occasionally slip into expressionless reading.

**Table 4.** Abot – Alam Learners’ Oral Fluency in terms of Accuracy, Expression and Volume

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Accuracy, Expression and Volume	18	1.500	4.000	<b>2.417</b>	0.772	<b>Instructional</b>

Note: 1. 00 – 2.00 frustration level; 2.01 – 3.00 instructional level; 3.01 – 4.00 independent level

Besides, the results of the current study disclosed that the level of oral fluency in terms of Phrasing and Smoothness (as shown in Tables 5 and 6) is instructional (2.556 and 2.500 respectively). This means that learners can read with a mixture of run-ons, mid – sentences pauses for breath, some choppiness, reasonable stress and intonation. Some also experience occasional breaks because of difficulties with some specific unfamiliar words.

**Table 5.** Abot – Alam Learners’ Oral Fluency Level in terms of Phrasing

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Phrasing	18	1.000	4.000	<b>2.556</b>	0.784	<b>Instructional</b>

Note: 1. 00 – 2.00 frustration level; 2.01 – 3.00 instructional level; 3.01 – 4.00 independent level

**Table 6.** Abot – Alam Learners’ Oral Fluency in terms of Smoothness

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Smoothness	18	1.500	4.000	<b>2.500</b>	0.569	<b>Instructional</b>

Note: 1. 00 – 2.00 frustration level; 2.01 – 3.00 instructional level; 3.01 – 4.00 independent level

Lastly, their level of fluency in terms of pacing and automaticity is also instructional (2.722). Some of them read in a moderately slow pace but majority reads with a mixture of fast and slow pace. Pacing has the highest mean score among the dimensions under study. This suggests that most of the learners can instantly read a passage.

**Table 7.** Abot – Alam Learners’ Oral Fluency in terms of Pacing

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Pace	18	1.500	4.000	<b>2.722</b>	0.624	<b>Instructional</b>

Note: 1. 00 – 2.00 frustration level; 2.01 – 3.00 instructional level; 3.01 – 4.00 independent level

### 3.3 Oral Fluency Level and Participants’ Demographic Profile

The following sections discuss whether there are any statistically significant differences in the respondents’ oral fluency level in terms of their demographic profile.

#### a. Oral Fluency Level and Participants’ Gender

The results in Table 8 below show that the mean score of language attitude among female students is 10.375 (SD = 2.586) while it is 9.833 (SD = 1.195) respectively among male students. These descriptive results prove that the level of oral fluency of female Abot – Alam learners are slightly higher than that of the male ones. It has long been considered and accepted that female performance on verbal tasks is superior to that of males (Gleitman, 1991; Halpern, 1986; Hyde & Linn, 1988 as cited in Hayes, Waller, 1994). When given more equal encouragement and access to education, on average, girls become even better in reading than boys (Nixon, 2012). It is therefore necessary for reading teachers to provide more reading opportunities to everyone most especially for boys. Reading passages relevant to their hobbies such as sports, online gaming and the likes must be utilized to motivate them to read more. Anime and comic strips may also be used by the teacher to engage the learners in oral reading. Performative reading such as readers’ theater, script – reading, role playing can also be a motivating tool for students to develop fluency (DiPillo & Rees, 2006). Integrating what the students like and what the students have to read is a must.

**Table 8.** Oral Fluency Level by Gender

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation	Spearman Rho (r-value)	P value
Male	6	<b>9.833</b>	1.195	<b>Instructional</b>	0.103	0.684
female	12	<b>10.375</b>	2.586	<b>Instructional</b>		

Note:  $0.1 < |r| < .3$  no correlation;  $0.3 < |r| < .5$  medium/moderate correlation;  $|r| > .5$  large/strong correlation \* p-value < 0.005

Moreover, the output of the Minitab program shows that no significant relationship exists between male and females and their level of fluency ( $p > 0.005$ ;  $r > 0.1$  and  $< 0.3$ ).

#### b. Oral Fluency Level and Participants’ Age

Table 9 below shows that the oral fluency mean scores among learners who are 15 – 17, 18 – 20, and 21 years old above are 9.667 (SD = 1.663), 8.38 (SD = 2.02), 11.500 (SD= 2.345) respectively.

Spearman Rho Correlation was run to assess the relationship between the level of fluency and age of 18 Abot - Alam learners. There was a moderate positive correlation between level of fluency and age,  $r(18) = 0.498$ . However, no strong significant relationship exists between them  $p(0.036) > .0005$ .

For the purpose of describing and interpreting the results in table 9, learners who are 21 years old and above have the highest level of oral fluency with the mean of 11.500 (2.345). This result opposes the notion that “older students may still be struggling with some of the more basic reading elements of decoding and fluency” (Bryan et al, 2007) and that “most adults have low level of literacy in reading” (Mellard, Anthony, & Woods, 2011). It is assumed that the older one gets, the more proficient he becomes in reading. However, a notable information can be taken from the results shown in table 9. The mean oral fluency of 18 – 20 years old is lower than that of the 15 – 17 years old learners (8.38, 9.667 respectively). This may suggest that 15 – 17 years old learners may be exposed to more oral reading activities than those who are 18 – 20 years old. As such, the former’s level of fluency is higher than that of the latter and is only points away from the frustration level range (8.38).

From among the three age groups, learners who are 18 – 20 years old require much attention. They must be given an intervention that can provide maximum benefits to them. It must have “right amounts of practice, error correction,



antecedent prompting strategies, and reinforcement” (Daly, Martens, Barnett, Witt, & Olson, 2007). Learners must be asked to practice reading regularly as fluency is fostered through repetitive practice. A number of studies have demonstrated that repeated readings of passages can lead to both improvements in reading of the passage and improvements in fluency and comprehension of passages never before seen (Rasinski, 2006).

Peer – reading and tutoring can also be employed. Research supports that students' reading skills improve well when working with their peers in structured reading activities (Greenwood, Delquadri, & Hall, 1989; Rosenshine & Meister, 1994; and Stevens, Madden, Slavin, & Famish, 1987 as cited in Adams & Brown, 2007).

Regardless of their age, all students must be exposed to regular practice and oral reading opportunities. Learners who are 18 – 20 years old must be given with reading material that offers general-knowledge information as they will benefit more fluency from this practice (Adams & Brown, 2007). Those who are 15 – 17 years old can be given a specific time in class where they could read a grade – level text and or a reading material that interests them the most. Learners who are 21 years old may also be given the autonomy to read materials in the area of their interests and more importantly, be given the time to read independently.

**Table 9.** Oral Fluency Level by Age

Age range	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation	Spearman Rho	P- value
15-17	6	9.667	1.663	<b>Instructional</b>	0.498	0.036
18-20	4	8.38	2.02	<b>Instructional</b>		
21 above	8	11.500	2.345	<b>instructional</b>		

Note:  $0.1 < |r| < .3$  small correlation;  $0.3 < |r| < .5$  medium/moderate correlation;  $|r| > .5$  large/strong correlation \* p- value < 0.005

### c. Oral Fluency Level and Participants' Year Level

Table 10 below shows that the fluency mean scores among learners who reached first year, second year, third year, fourth year and those who graduated from 6<sup>th</sup> Grade are as follows: 9.33 (SD = 2.75), 8.50 (SD = 1.41), 10.69 (SD = 3.03) and 10.500 (SD= 0.707) and 11.00 (SD = 0.000). It can be observed that the elementary graduates have the highest mean score in their fluency, followed by those who reached 3<sup>rd</sup> year high school, 4<sup>th</sup> year high school, 1<sup>st</sup> year high school, and 2<sup>nd</sup> year high school. However, this does not necessarily mean that elementary graduates are more fluent than those in the higher years since they were given different reading passages. It just implies that the learners are fluent in reading their grade – level text which is in Grade 6.

These results call for the reading teachers to work more on improving the fluency levels of those who are near the frustration level range – 2<sup>nd</sup> year. Their mean score which is 8.500 reflects a greater need for intervention. Assistance should be taken and it can be best done when students read and simultaneously hear someone read the same text with them. It can even involve listening to a prerecorded version of the passage while reading. When the reader visually examines the words and phrases while simultaneously hearing the words and phrases read to him or her, the sight and sound of the printed text is more likely to get into the reader's head, and thus more easily and fluently retrieved when encountered at a later time (Rasinski, 2006).

Spearman Rho Correlation was used in analyzing the differences in the participants' level of oral fluency regarding their year level. The Minitab output demonstrates that there is no significant difference in the over- all level of oral fluency to their year level as the p-value is greater than 0.005 ( $p = 0.229 > 0.005$ ,  $r = 0.298$ ).

Indeed, the results of this study disproves the belief that the “number of years in English instruction influences standardized reading test results (Cota, 1997). It does not also follow the view which highlights the role of educational attainment being conclusive of the level of proficiency in English that one gets (Roleff, 2009).

**Table 10.** Oral Fluency Level by Year Level

Age range	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation	Spearman Rho	P- value
1 <sup>st</sup> Year	3	9.33	2.75	<b>Instructional</b>	0.298	0.229
2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	2	8.50	1.41	<b>Instructional</b>		
3 <sup>rd</sup> Year	9	10.69	3.03	<b>Instructional</b>		
4 <sup>th</sup> Year	2	10.500	0.707	<b>Instructional</b>		
Elem. Graduate	2	11.00	0.000	<b>Instructional</b>		

Note:  $0.1 < |r| < .3$  small correlation;  $0.3 < |r| < .5$  medium/moderate correlation;  $|r| > .5$  large/strong correlation \* p- value < 0.005

#### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The respondents' instructional level of English oral fluency may lead us to the conclusion that albeit their experience of school leaving, the learners are still capable of reading their grade – level text with 90% or more accuracy, mixture of moderately fast and slow pacing, and with expressive interpretation in most of the paragraph.

Since oral fluency is crucial to the learners' success as readers, thinkers, leaders and employees in the near future, it is a huge responsibility for curriculum designers, administrators and reading teachers to not cease from giving them an environment that promotes the value of oral reading. At a micro level, the teachers must first inculcate the importance of listening to fluent oral reading. Teachers must model fluency by orally reading a text so learners can develop an internal sense of fluency. Other fluent readers can also be encouraged to read aloud. Secondly, proper assistance must be given to students who read in a non-fluent way. Other than the teacher, assistance can be through peer reading or peer tutoring, or even parent – student reading. Teachers must also utilize reading strategies and methods that best enhance reading instruction. Moreover, ALS facilitators and Abot – Alam implementers must also build reading corners in their respective Community Learning Centers (CLCs) just like what is done in the formal schools. If not feasible, the teachers could build mobile libraries or mobile reading hubs to be used when conducting different classes in different barangays. These will help develop and improve the learners' motivation to read and will eventually impact their reading proficiency. These reading hubs must be filled with relevant, interesting and engaging reading materials and supplementary resources. Curriculum designers and reading specialists must also continue creating reading programs and interventions especially schemed for the diverse learners under the Alternative Learning System.

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**APPENDIX**

**I. Profile Survey Questionnaire**

**Direction:** Check items as applicable.

**A. Age**

( ) 15 – 17 years old

( ) 18 – 20 years old

( ) 21 years old and above

**B. Gender**

( ) Male

( ) Female

( ) 2<sup>nd</sup> year HS

( ) 3<sup>rd</sup> year HS

( ) 4<sup>th</sup> year HS

**C. Year Level**

( ) Elementary graduate

( ) 1<sup>st</sup> year HS

**II. Factors of School Drop-out Checklist**

<p><b>School-related reasons:</b>                  Had many absences __                  Was getting poor grades/failing school __                  Did not like school __                  Could not keep up with schoolwork __                  Thought could not complete school requirements __                  Could not get along with teachers __                  Did not feel belong there __                  Could not get along with others __                  Was suspended __                  Changed schools and did not like new one __                  Thought would fail tests __                  Did not feel safe __                  Was expelled __</p>	<p><b>Family-related reasons:</b>                  Was Pregnant __                  Had to support family __                  Had to care for a member of the family __                  Became a father/mother of a baby __                  Married or planned to get married __</p> <p><b>Employment-related reasons:</b>                  Got a job __                  Could not work at same time __</p> <p><b>Peer-related reasons:</b>                  Influenced by friends __</p> <p><b>Others (cite) _____</b></p>
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### III. The Standardized Oral Reading Paragraphs by Dr. William S. Gray

Direction: Read the passage orally. Be guided by the scale below:

#### GRADE 6/ ELEMENTARY GRADUATE:

Africa was once filled with an abundance of wild animals. But that is changing fast. One of these animals, the black rhinoceros, lives on the plains of Africa. It has very poor eyesight and a very bad temper! Even though the black rhino is powerful, and can be dangerous, its strength can't always help it to escape hunters.

#### GRADE 7/ 1<sup>ST</sup> YEAR:

One of the most interesting birds which ever lived in my bird room was a blue-jay named Jackie. He was full of business from morning until night, scarcely ever still. He had been stolen from a nest long before he could fly, and he had been reared in a house long before he had been given to me as a pet.

#### GRADE 8/ 2<sup>ND</sup> YEAR:

It was one of those wonderful evenings such are found only in this magnificent region. The sun had sunk behind the mountains, but it was still early. The pretty twilight glow embraced a third of the sky and against its brilliancy stood the dull white masses of the mountains in evident contrast.

#### GRADE 9/ 3<sup>RD</sup> YEAR:

The crown and glory of a useful life is character. It is the noblest profession of man. It forms a rank in itself, an estate in general goodwill; dignifying every station and exalting every position in the society. It exercises a greater power than wealth and is a valuable means of securing honor.

#### GRADE 10/ 4<sup>TH</sup> YEAR:

Responding to the impulse of habit Josephus spoke as of old. The others listened attentively but in grim and contemptuous silence. He spoke at length, continuously, persistently and ingratiatingly. Finally exhausted through loss of strength he hesitated. As always happens in such exigencies he was lost.

Multidimensional Fluency Scale © Zutell & Rasinski, 1991

Scores range 4–16. Scores below 8 indicate that fluency may be a concern. Scores of 8 or above indicate that the students are making good progress in fluency.

Reader Fluency Area					Score
<b>A. Accuracy, Expression and Volume</b>	<b>1</b> Reads words as if simply to get them out. Little sense of trying to make text sound like natural language. Tends to read in a quiet voice; Makes 7 and above errors in pronunciation	<b>2</b> Begins to use voice to make text sound like natural language in some in areas of the text but not in others. Focus remains largely on pronouncing the words. Still reads in a quiet voice. Makes 4 – 6 errors in reading.	<b>3</b> Makes text sound like natural language throughout the better part of the passage. Occasionally slips into expressionless reading. Voice volume is generally appropriate throughout the text. Makes 1 - 3 errors in pronunciation	<b>4</b> Reads with good expression and enthusiasm throughout the text. Varies expression and volume to match his or her interpretation of the passage. Pronunciation of words is perfect.	
<b>B. Phrasing</b>	<b>1</b> Reads in monotone with little sense of phrase boundaries; frequently reads word-by-word	<b>2</b> Frequently reads in two- and three-word phrases, giving the impression of choppy reading; improper stress and intonation fail to mark ends of sentences and clauses.	<b>3</b> Reads with a mixture of run-ons, mid-sentence pauses for breath, and some choppiness; reasonable stress and intonation.	<b>4</b> Generally reads with good phrasing, mostly in clause and sentence units, with adequate attention to expression.	
<b>C. Smoothness</b>	<b>1</b> Makes frequent extended pauses, hesitations, false starts, sound-outs, repetitions, and/or multiple attempts frequent and disruptive.	<b>2</b> Experiences several “rough spots” in text where extended pauses or hesitations are more	<b>3</b> Occasionally breaks smooth rhythm because of difficulties with specific words and/or structures.	<b>4</b> Generally reads smoothly with some breaks, but resolves word and structure difficulties quickly, usually through self-correction.	
<b>D. Pace</b>	<b>1</b> Reads slowly and laboriously.	<b>2</b> Reads moderately slowly.	<b>3</b> Reads with an uneven mixture of fast and slow pace.	<b>4</b> Consistently reads at conversational pace; appropriate rate throughout reading.	