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Low Reading Literacy Skills of Elementary Pupils in the Philippines: Systematic Review

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Abstract: ***This meta-synthesis aims to synthesize factors that affect the low reading literacy skills among pupils enrolled in elementary schools in the Philippines. Fifteen (15) studies from 2013 to 2022 were screened and selected using a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria. Published papers from Google Scholar, CrossRef, and OpenAlex databases from Publish or Perish software were used to collect studies related to the factors affecting the pupils' low reading literacy skills. The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist was utilized to quality check data, and the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flow diagram was used to organize the studies that are included. By using thematic analysis, the factors affecting the low reading literacy skills in Philippines' elementary learners were identified as the meta-theme. Accordingly, seven sub-themes emerged namely, lack of reading elements, inclusion of learners-at-risk, lack of reading enthusiasm, teacher's incompetence, shortage in reading materials and facilities, parental involvement and student's health. Therefore, when creating development plans for the learners, the requirement for reading level advancement must be taken into account. It is recommended that a restructured reading program with constant progress monitoring and reading diagnosis be conducted in Philippine elementary schools.***
Keywords: factors, reading literacy skills, elementary pupils, Philippines, meta-synthesis

I. INTRODUCTION

Reading is the true foundation of most learning (Ditona & Rico, 2021). Reading is the cornerstone of all academic learning. Learning to read, write, and count is critical for a child's success in school and in life. Furthermore, the acquisition of reading literacy skills is important for every learner because this will help in almost every aspect of our lives (Keyser, n.d.). Reading is important because spoken and written words are the building blocks of what we'll become in the future (Davis, G., 2016). People, families, relationships, and even the cooperation of nations are built from words (Cabalo & Cabalo, 2019). Cimmiyotti (2013) stated that reading is essential at all levels of education because all subjects in the course require reading, which leads to improved academic performance. The educational system is challenged to produce effective readers. The Philippines' poor performance in reading proficiency which resulted in the country ranking lowest in the world only proves that schools hardly meet their goal to provide quality and well-informed individuals. Moreover, the pandemic lockdown greatly affected learners in the country as the recent study conducted by UNICEF showed the results of students in the Philippines having poor reading skills.

According to Cayubit (2012), poor reading ability manifests itself in a variety of ways, including poor comprehension and incorrect pronunciation. If effective help is not provided early on, the child's intellectual, social, and psychological development may suffer. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund found out that 15% of school children can read simple text. Meaning that there are only three out of every twenty are literate. The pandemic lockdown was found to be one factor that affected this finding. According to Sanford (2015), one of the most significant problems impeding kids' reading comprehension is phonemic awareness, or the capacity to absorb the individual sounds of letters, which is required for word recognition. Another element influencing a student's ability to read and comprehend texts is poor working memory. Moreover, there are still a lot of factors that influence a learner's ability to read such as a decoding deficit, a lack of attention, a poor vocabulary, a lack of knowledge foundation, poor language processing skills, poor memory, and so on (Modesto & Ferreira, 2013).

Each student learns at a different pace. However, some children were not given equal opportunities. In the Philippines, there are a lot of programs that have been implemented to support the learners' reading performance. Literacy enhancement is one of the Department of Education's top priorities. This is anchored on the flagship program of the Department: "Every Child A Reader Program (ECARP)," This aspires to make every Filipino child proficient in reading and writing at their grade level (DepEd Order Number 14, 2018). Nevertheless, some public elementary schools across the country were not successful in implementing it. A study by Adriano in 2015, revealed that in Bulacan public elementary schools, ECARP was not effective in improving the reading skills of the students. Moreover, there was a problem with the school's capacity to implement the program due to the lack of

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monitoring and follow-through by the administration. Findings from the 2018 PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) indicated that, among 79 nations, the Philippines ranked the lowest in reading comprehension. In addition, former DepEd Sec. Abad said in 2005, that poor reading comprehension, which leads to a lack of understanding of printed symbols, is one of the most significant challenges in reading. In this regard, to have a solid solution to this problem, certain factors need to be determined. Thus, this meta-synthesis method aims to determine the factors that affect the low reading literacy skills among pupils enrolled in the Philippines' elementary schools. In this way, the study can be utilized as a reference for organizations developing concrete reading programs.

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study utilized meta-synthesis in conducting it. This study employed the meta-synthesis research approach in order to produce an evidence-based explanation of a phenomenon or process as well as advance theoretical and conceptual knowledge (Schreiber et al. 1997). This method combines qualitative data to come up with a new way to look at the research field (Atkins et al., 2008).

B. Search Strategy

In this meta-synthesis study, the researchers established inclusion and exclusion criteria. Published papers from Google Scholar, CrossRef, and OpenAlex databases were used to select studies related to the factors affecting the Philippines' elementary schools pupils' low reading literacy skills using Publish or Perish Software. The researchers specifically set the timeline from 2013 to 2022 and were downloaded and analyzed. The keywords used in the Publish or Perish software to extract articles were as follows: factors, low reading, literacy, elementary schools, qualitative research design, Philippines. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram was used to sort out extracted data.

C. Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria provide a foundation for the reviewer to reach meaningful and valid judgments conclusion (Meline, 2006). The following criteria were used to select the studies for this review: (a) must include studies related to the factors affecting the low reading skills of elementary school pupils'; (b) papers are published from 2013-2022; (c) research design must be qualitative; (d) must be written in English; (e) must qualify using the CASP for quality assessment. The procedure for selecting research papers is depicted in the figure below.

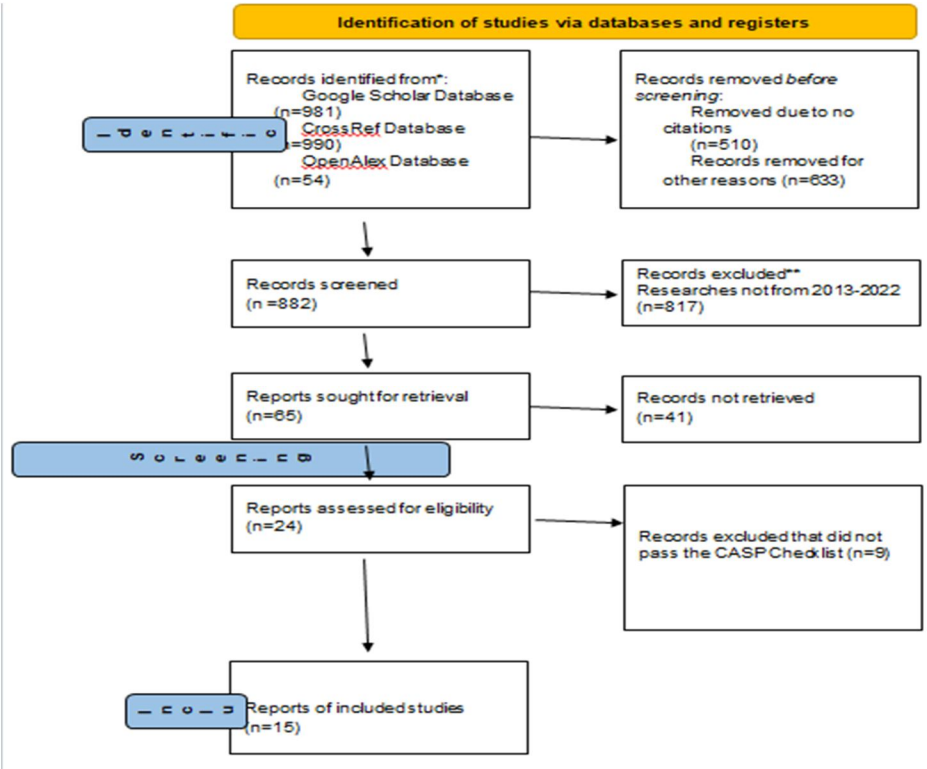


Figure 1. Search strategy using PRISMA

III. DATA ANALYSIS

The selected data on low reading literacy were subjected to continual comparison and thematic analysis by Clarke et al. (2015). By using thematic analysis, researchers will do the following: (1) familiarizing the research articles; (2) producing initial codes by compiling the data; (3) searching for themes relevant to the study; (4) reviewing themes through using thematic map; (5) defining and naming themes; (6) producing the report through discussion of analysis and implication of the study.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The factors that affected the low reading literacy skills of the pupils in the Philippines were used to generate initial codes, and the 15 studies were taken into account in this meta-synthesis. Table 1 shows the study's title, authors, and the generated initial codes utilized for theme analysis.

Table 1. Studies focusing on the factors that affects low reading

No.	Authors and Year of Publication	Factors
1	Tomas et al. 2021	• Non-mastery of the elements of reading - No phonological awareness - Non-mastery of alphabet knowledge - Non-mastery of phonics - Poor word recognition and vocabulary - Poor fluency skills - Lack of comprehension • Presence of learners-at-risk - Presence of nonreaders - Poor health condition - Presence of LSENs in regular class - Lack of interest in reading - Lack of orientation and training to teach reading - Frequent absenteeism of learners • No culture of reading - No opportunity for independent reading - Lack of reading materials - Failure to give learners sufficient guidance for reading - Absence of parents, teachers and learners reading partnership - Lack of teacher's commitment & confidence to teach reading - Improper implementation of reading program - No monitoring of learner's progress during intervention
2	Erickson 2019	• Scarce and limited motivation • Neglecting basic psychological needs • Lack of interest
3	Miñoza et al. 2019	• Socio-economic status • Parental Involvement

4	Estremera et. al. 2018	• Pupil Factors - Nutritional Status - Pupils are not motivated to read - Pupils read stories, selections and essays selectively - Pupils' poor study habit • Language Factors - Pupils' poor/limited vocabulary - Low comprehension level - Pupils are not immersed to English • School Factors - Class size - Lack of catchy reading materials - Substandard classroom for learning with inadequate - facilities • Home Factors - No follow-ups at home - Less motivation by siblings to study - Absence of reading materials at home
5	Altun et al. 2021	• Home Literacy Environment • Number of books in the household • Maternal Reading Attitudes • Maternal Reading Habits
6	Cabalo 2019	• Teacher's performance • No follow up at home by the parents
7	Mirasol 2021	• Not enough reading resources at home • Limited access to literacy-rich environment
8	Mule 2014	• Variety of textbooks in schools are limited • Budget allocation for schools are insufficient to buy set of books (lack of reading materials) • Lack of English development • Teachers lacked the competencies in teaching
9	Rivera & Aggabao 2020	• Word recognition • Comprehension • Reading behaviors while reading - read text in an intermittent way - show inability to distinguish sounds - tend to stutter in the pronunciation of words
10	Gündoğmuş 2018	• Parental indifference • Unreadiness of students • Lack of professional experience of teachers • student • Absenteeism • Lack of interest of students • Physical inadequacies

11	Akubuilo 2015	• Socio-Economic • Physical abnormalities in reading • Mental Imbalance • Teachers' Inability to help children • Unfamiliarity with Symbols and Lack of Interest in Learning
12	Naidoo et. al. 2014	• Number of Educators Attending Workshops • Reading Levels of Learners • Second Language Factors • Socio-economic Factors • Language of Instruction
13	Larioque 2019	• Reading Habits at Home • Low Perception on Reading • Parents' Educational Background • Family Socio-economic Status • School and Classroom Facilities • Class Hours/Schedule
14	Pourhosein et. al. 2016	• Complexity of the texts • Environmental Conditions • Anxiety During Reading Comprehension • Interest and Motivation • Decoding or Word Recognition Speed • Medical Problems
15	Huang et. al. 2015	• School Facilities and Policies to Promote Reading • Teachers' Professional Knowledge and Skills • Family's Role in Promoting Reading • One's Reading Behavior and that of Peers

The table shows the initial codes on the factors that affect the low reading literacy skills in Philippines' elementary Schools to generate themes. The codes that the researchers produced were analyzed using thematic analysis in which seven (7) themes and one (1) meta-theme were constructed.

The constructed codes are the following: (1) lack of mastery of reading elements; (2) inclusion of learners-at-risk; (3) lack of reading enthusiasm; (4) teachers' incompetence; (5) shortage in reading materials and facilities; (6) parental involvement; and (7) students' health. The seven (7) themes and one (1) meta-theme are addressed further below.

A. Meta-Theme: Factors Affecting the Low Reading Literacy Skills in Philippines' Elementary Schools

Reading has always been considered essential to academic success. Unfortunately, a lot of students have trouble with this aspect. Results from the 2018 PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) revealed that, out of 79 nations, the Philippines had the lowest reading comprehension scores. This only shows the lack of basic reading and comprehension skills among Filipino students. It is critical to identify the issues that are rooted in low reading proficiency to develop and enhance students' reading comprehension skills as a vital component of their overall learning (Larioque, 2019).

A problem is always triggered by certain influences. Knowing what affects elementary pupils' low reading literacy skills helps educational institutions and organizations in creating development plans for the learners.

Seven sub-themes were developed from the meta-theme, the factors affecting the low reading literacy skills in the Philippines' elementary schools.

1) Theme I. Lack of Mastery of Reading Elements

For young learners, reading mastery was found to have potentially good benefits on reading fluency but no detectable effects on comprehension (US, Department of Education, 2010). In the study by Tomas, et al in 2021, reading is a complicated process because it entails "sensation, perception, comprehension, application, and integration." In the same study, reading is considered to be the process of creating and interpreting meaning from written words and symbols. Reading as a whole is a form of communication, as well as a source of knowledge and ideas (Aracelo, 1994).

In a study conducted by Gilakjani & Sabouri in 2016, they found out that the difficulty of the texts is one of the elements that affect students' ability to understand what they have read. Since students hear words and pick up a lot of terminologies, oral skills play a big role in determining how skilled a reader can be (Gilakjani et. al, 2016). In the same study, decoding or word recognition speed has also been found as an additional factor. Moreover, reading comprehension is affected by vocabulary because readers utilize decoding abilities to comprehend the pronunciation and meaning of words they have never encountered before (Dennis, 2008).

Additionally, Tomas et al (2021) stated that one of the underlying problems that affect the poor reading skills of learners is their non-mastery of the elements of reading: (1) no phonological awareness; (2) not knowing the alphabet; (3) not knowing phonics; (4) weak word identification and vocabulary; (5) lack of fluency skills; and (6) not understanding what is being read.

2) Theme II. Inclusion of Learners-at-Risk

Learners-at-risk refers to learners who are deemed to be at a greater risk of academic failure or dropping out of school. The ongoing practices of some schools of passing learners at risk in a regular classroom despite their inability to read forced them to move forward to another grade level without accommodating their reading needs. The DepEd Order No. 45, s. 2002, stated that no student would be promoted to the next higher grade unless he or she demonstrates mastery of basic literacy skills at a specific grade level. This only results in an increasing number of unsuccessful readers in our country.

The study of Tomas et. al. (2021) stated that one of the underlying problems that affect the poor reading skills of learners is the presence of learners-at-risk in a regular classroom such as (1) the presence of nonreaders where 1st and 2nd-grade pupils have no idea what are the names of the letters in the alphabet and find it hard to read words with -ng in Filipino, (2) LSENs presence in regular class which there's no specific assessment for them and teachers use the same methods and materials to both typical and atypical students which affect the class performance in reading, and (3) the frequent absenteeism of learners because of family matters and their inability to read. Success in school heavily depends on one's ability to read. It is one of the most crucial abilities a learner must be able to master. According to the study, creating reading environments based on reading needs may be beneficial in overcoming reading issues. Furthermore, the removal of these challenges is aided by the application of appropriate methodologies, teaching strategies, and individual variances in learners (Tomas et. al., 2021).

3) Theme III. Lack of Reading Enthusiasm

One article from Philippine Star (2010) states that "the undeniable fact remains that the majority of Filipino students do not possess the ability and motivation to read. Due to the fast-evolving world and changing technology, it cannot be denied that sometimes reading is taken for granted." Reading development and achievement of learners are greatly affected by their motivation. However, compared with older students, primary-age readers' motivation is scarce and limited.

Low self-esteem among struggling readers impedes the development of solutions to reading issues. These students only lag because they are convinced they can never catch up. Due to negative reinforcement, many struggling readers refuse to cooperate with anyone who could help them (Tomas, et. al., 2021). Studies show that while reading may be affected by the learner's motivation, it is also influenced by their environment. Some children do not get enough chances to discover the world of words and books, which makes them less interested in learning about it. Former DepEd Sec. Abad lamented the poor performance of the student's assessment test and claimed that the student's poor performance in fundamental reading and comprehension skills is to blame for their weak results in science, math, and english. This has been a great challenge not only for the teachers but also for the parents and students. Without motivation and interest in reading, learners will never be able to learn to read.

4) Theme IV. Teachers' Incompetence

The most important and efficient tool in the educational system is the teacher (Cabalo & Cabalo, 2019). Perhaps, teachers are the first ones to be blamed for why this reading literacy problem exists. Although there are several reading programs introduced by the Department of Education, their implementation is where things get choked up. Teachers— the implementers of these programs, prefer shortcuts.

Before actually teaching reading readiness, they begin by teaching the letters (Tomas et. al., 2021). Children's readiness for reading will be affected if teachers are unable to assist them in learning these reading skills to avoid difficulties in reading on their own (Akubilo, 2015). Moreover, reading lessons frequently started without leaning on the students' past knowledge to link earlier learning to the new skills (Mule, 2014). Connecting the learners' past knowledge could make the development of reading easier. Aside from that, the experience of reading teachers is said to also influence pupils' reading literacy. New teachers are unfamiliar with how to teach reading to students, while experienced teachers prefer to just use the same approach or strategy they have been using (Tomas et. al., 2021). Teachers' performance improves together with their experience. A teacher's arsenal of teaching strategies and methods for reading depends on his level of training (Cabalo & Cabalo, 2019). Monitoring of learners' progress has not been done by most teachers. Teachers' reading interventions never extend outside schools and do not have a continuation grade after grade. To teach reading, the teachers must be qualified specialists (Mule, 2014). Educators: must have continuous training, must be motivated to improve, must allow students to read independently, and utilize accessible reading materials and devices inside the classroom (Mule, 2014).

5) Theme V. Shortage in Reading Materials and Facilities

According to Cameron (2002), every reading classroom should offer a safe and friendly environment for kids to read, either alone or with a partner or group. There should be comfy seats in this reading area. According to Lerner (2000), teachers should give students reading opportunities, inform them of the range of books available, and connect their independent reading to their daily life. Without a reading area, students are not encouraged to read more or develop their English reading skills as one might want. The lack of reading books appears to have prevented students from developing their independent reading skills.

Numerous schools, especially those in rural areas, lack different storybooks that are suitable for the pupils' grade level. No picture books are available for early readers or nonreaders. Even if English is their sole language, picture books will provide kids the freedom to be imaginative in creating their own stories. Although the LRMDS produced storybooks, they have not yet been widely distributed. (Tomas and others, 2021). The schools may not have ordered a range of textbooks for students to use, or the funding allocated to schools may not be sufficient to purchase an additional set of books, which could account for the observed lack of English reading proficiency. According to Lerner (2000), reading is a continuous talent that continuously gets better with practice; therefore, without practice reading ability would not advance. Learners need to read a wide range of English materials so they don't get stuck reading the same thing over and over and getting bored.

6) Theme VI. Parental Involvement

The development of children is greatly influenced by parents because they serve as role models for their children (Berns, 2004). This being said means that when parents involve themselves in their child's reading development, it can have a significant effect on the child's interest and attitude towards reading which can result in reading achievement.

According to the findings on the synthesis, (1) no follow-up at home by the parents, (2) parents reading attitude and habits, and (3) the home literacy environment is one of the significant factors that influence a learner's poor reading literacy skills. According to the study of Estremera et al (2018) that when parents rarely monitor their children's progress in education when they go back to their respective homes after class, they are less motivated to study. If parents engage themselves more with their children's reading development high-quality reading-related experiences will result. Since parents serve as role models for their children; hence, their ideas and actions impact those of their offspring (Bandura, 1989). The home literacy environment is also a factor that affects a child's reading ability, HLE is a multifaceted notion that covers home literacy-related sources, interactions, and experiences (Altun, 2021). Everything that is provided to them by parents and caregivers such as shared reading habits at home, their exposure to different books, and techno-literacy is said to influence the child's ability to read.

Thus, parents should be more involved with their children because they greatly influence them to be more literate and also help them reach their potential not just in school but also in their child's life. The involvement of parents is a generally recognized factor in the success of their children (Mudzielwana, 2014).

7) Theme VII. Students' Health

Reading readiness, as defined by UNICEF (2012), is the method of preparing a child competent for reading, motivating them to read, and getting them interested in it. However, being ready to read means that all of the socioemotional, physical, and mental components necessary for reading have developed. In other words, it is a stage of growth that gets the child ready for reading experiences on the levels of mind, body, and social-emotional health.

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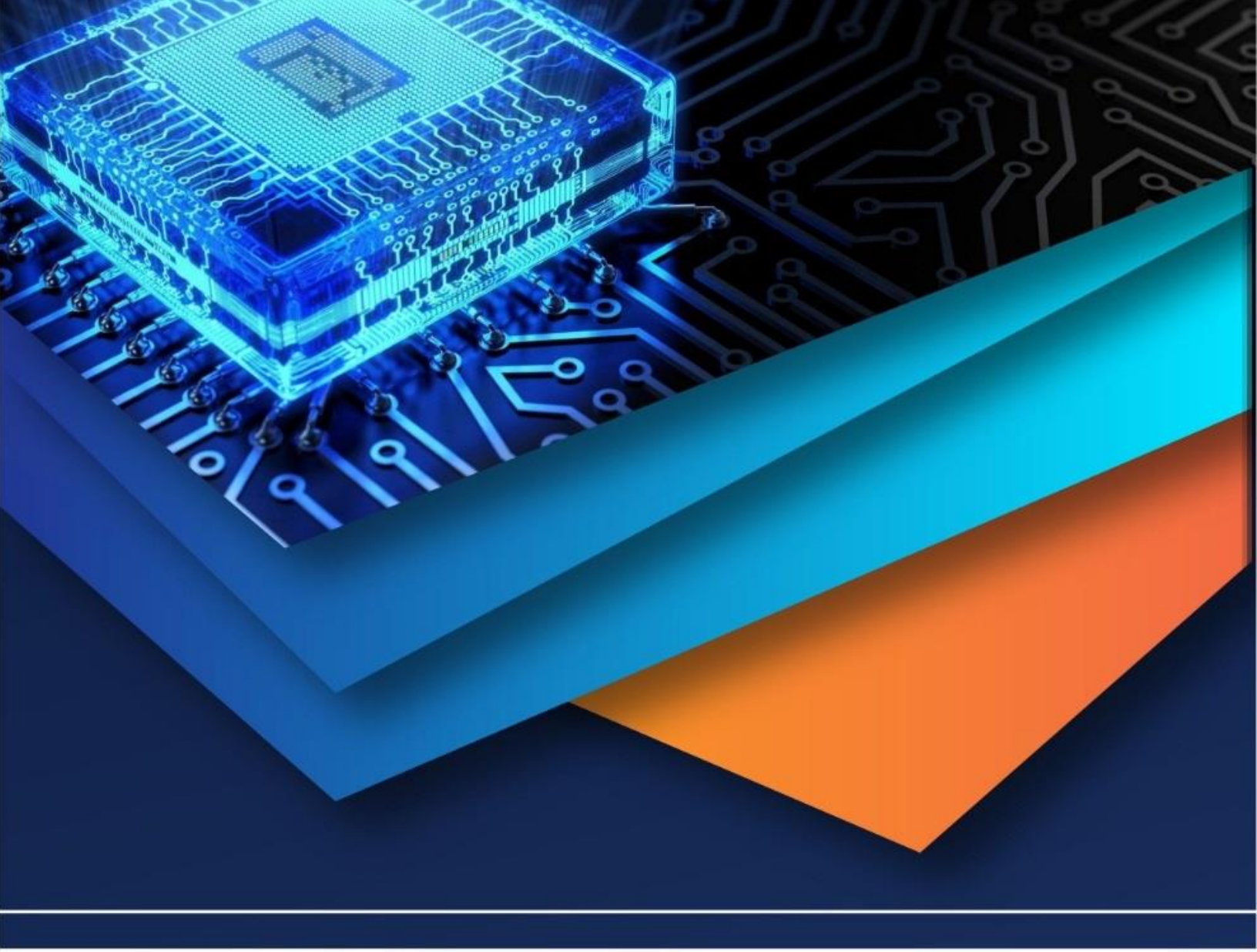
According to the findings of a study done in 2013 by Putri, children with mental imbalances have trouble pronouncing letters, words, and sentences with a paragraph, which makes it difficult for them to comprehend and recount the content of reading. Their mental health may be impacted by variables such as poverty, dysfunctional families, genetics, and bullying. However, these circumstances may also have an impact on their physical health. For young children, physical and mental health is of utmost importance. The World Health Organization defined health as a whole condition of well-being, not only the absence of sickness. Some learners' capacity to absorb information and develop their self-confidence is hampered by their bad health. To meet their needs, it is crucial to determine the health issues that have an impact on their reading abilities. If their physical and mental health is not taken care of, they would not ever learn effectively and would not be able to progress in reading in a satisfactory way.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The reading deterioration of the students over the years is one of the major problems that our country is facing. It is one of the factors that caused the educational crisis in the Philippines. The various factors were identified in order to determine what causes the students to fall behind in their reading. These factors resulted in the students' poor academic performance. It is recommended that a restructured reading program with constant progress monitoring and reading diagnosis be conducted in Philippine elementary schools.

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