



# CAUSES OF LOW READING PROFICIENCY LEVELS IN ENGLISH OF GRADE 7 STUDENTS IN SULAT NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the causes of low reading proficiency levels in English among Grade 7 students of Sulat National High School during the School Year 2024–2025. Using a descriptive-correlational research design, the study involved 155 Grade 7 students and 10 English teachers as respondents. Data were collected through a standardized reading proficiency test adapted from the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) and a researcher-made survey questionnaire that measured home-related, student-related, teacher-related, and school-related factors affecting reading proficiency. Findings revealed that the majority of the students were classified at the Developing and Approaching Proficiency levels, with a mean proficiency score of 2.41, indicating generally low reading performance in English. Home-related factors such as limited parental support, inadequate availability of reading materials, and minimal exposure to English at home were found to significantly contribute to low reading proficiency. Student-related factors, including motivation, study habits, reading confidence, and attitudes toward reading, showed the strongest relationship with reading performance. Teacher-related factors demonstrated a moderate influence, reflecting adequate teacher competence but limited implementation of differentiated reading interventions. School-related factors, such as insufficient reading programs, limited library resources, and large class sizes, also contributed to students' reading difficulties. Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis revealed that all identified factors – home-related, student-related, teacher-related, and school-related – had significant relationships with students' reading proficiency levels, with student-related factors exhibiting the strongest correlation. The study concludes that low reading proficiency among Grade 7 students is a multifaceted issue resulting from the interaction of individual, instructional, home, and institutional factors. It recommends a holistic and collaborative approach involving students, parents, teachers, school administrators, and policymakers to strengthen reading instruction, enhance home literacy environments, and improve school-based reading programs.

**KEYWORDS:** Reading Proficiency, Grade 7 Students, English Reading, Home-Related Factors, Student-Related Factors, Teacher-Related Factors, School-Related Factors, Descriptive-Correlational Study

## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Study

Reading proficiency is a fundamental skill that underpins life-long learning and academic achievement. Despite decades of global efforts to improve literacy, international reports continue to highlight a persistent learning crisis, as millions of learners still fail to attain minimum reading proficiency levels. Recent monitoring by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) shows that substantial proportions of learners worldwide remain below the minimum benchmarks in literacy, especially in low- and middle-income countries, thereby affecting their opportunities for higher learning and socio-economic advancement (UIS, 2023).

In Southeast Asia, the problem of low reading proficiency is also evident. The Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) 2019 report revealed that a considerable proportion of students in several ASEAN member countries are classified as low-performing readers. The study highlighted contextual factors such as poverty, limited access to early childhood education, multilingual environments, and varying levels of teacher preparation as major contributors to weak reading

outcomes (SEA-PLM, 2019). These findings underscore the fact that literacy challenges are not only global but also deeply rooted in the Southeast Asian region.

In the Philippines, international and national assessments have drawn attention to the urgent need to strengthen reading instruction. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 showed that the reading performance of Filipino students remained largely unchanged compared with 2018, with the majority of students performing at or below the lowest proficiency levels. Results also revealed disparities between public and private school students, with learners from public schools lagging behind their private school counterparts (OECD, 2023). Similarly, the Department of Education (DepEd) has acknowledged that reading deficiencies are a recurring problem reflected in the National Achievement Test (NAT) results, which have consistently shown below-average performance in English and other core subjects. In response, DepEd has called for stronger utilization of assessment data to inform instructional reforms (DepEd Region VIII, 2024).

At the regional level, Eastern Visayas (Region VIII) faces notable literacy challenges. Data from the Functional Literacy,



Education, and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) indicate that only about 85.1% of the population aged five years and older in the region possess basic literacy skills, which is lower compared to some other regions of the country (PSA, 2024). The DepEd regional office has recognized these gaps and issued directives emphasizing the use of the 2019–2023 NAT and the 2022 PISA results to strengthen instruction across schools in the region (DepEd Region VIII, 2024). These data highlight the pressing need to examine reading proficiency at more localized levels, especially in rural areas where challenges may be more pronounced.

In Eastern Samar, anecdotal observations and preliminary reports from schools indicate that many students enter high school with limited reading proficiency in English. This is particularly problematic at the Grade 7 level, where learners are expected to transition from mother tongue-based instruction in the elementary level to English as the primary medium of instruction in many secondary subjects. Teachers at Sulat National High School, for instance, have expressed concerns that a significant number of Grade 7 students demonstrate poor reading comprehension and fluency in English, which affects not only their performance in English classes but also in other content areas that require strong reading skills.

While international, regional, and national assessments have clearly documented the prevalence of low reading proficiency, they do not provide sufficient explanations of the localized causes affecting specific schools and communities. Existing studies in the Philippines tend to focus on early grade literacy, leaving a research gap in understanding reading difficulties among secondary students, particularly those in Grade 7 who are undergoing academic and linguistic transitions. Moreover, there is limited evidence that explores how home-related factors, student motivation, teacher practices, and school resources intersect to influence reading proficiency in rural secondary schools like those in Eastern Samar (SEA-PLM, 2019; OECD, 2023).

This study, therefore, seeks to fill these gaps by investigating the causes of low reading proficiency in English among Grade 7 students of Sulat National High School. By employing a mixed-methods approach that combines reading proficiency testing with surveys, interviews, and classroom observations, this research will not only identify the extent of the problem but also uncover the contextual factors contributing to it. The findings are expected to inform actionable interventions for teachers, school leaders, and parents, and to align with DepEd's call to utilize assessment data for improving instruction. Ultimately, the study will provide a localized evidence base that can guide practical solutions to enhance reading proficiency in Sulat National High School and similar contexts in Eastern Visayas.

### Statement of the Problem

This study aims to investigate the causes of low reading proficiency levels in English of Grade 7 students in Sulat National High School for School Year 2024–2025.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of reading proficiency in English of Grade 7 students in Sulat National High School?

2. What are the causes of low reading proficiency in terms of:
  - 2.1 Home-related factors (e.g., parental support, availability of reading materials, home language environment);
  - 2.2 Student-related factors (e.g., motivation, study habits, attitude toward reading, language exposure);
  - 2.3 Teacher-related factors (e.g., instructional strategies, use of reading interventions, teacher competence in reading instruction); and
  - 2.4 School-related factors (e.g., availability of reading resources, class size, school reading programs)?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the identified causes (home, student, teacher, and school-related factors) and the reading proficiency levels of Grade 7 students?

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design to determine the causes of low reading proficiency in English among Grade 7 students of Sulat National High School. The descriptive aspect of the design seeks to describe the existing levels of reading proficiency of the students and identify the prevailing home-related, student-related, teacher-related, and school-related factors that influence their performance. Meanwhile, the correlational aspect will examine the relationship between these identified factors and students' reading proficiency levels to determine which variables contribute significantly to the problem.

The choice of a descriptive-correlational design is appropriate for this study because it allows the researcher to collect quantifiable data on multiple variables and analyze the patterns of association between them without manipulating the study environment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By doing so, the study does not only present the current situation of reading proficiency in the school but also identifies the possible predictors of students' performance.

Furthermore, this design is suitable because the problem under investigation involves multiple interrelated factors. Reading proficiency is influenced by learners' home environment, personal characteristics, teachers' instructional competence, and school resources, all of which interact in complex ways. The descriptive-correlational design enables the researcher to capture these dynamics systematically and provide evidence-based insights for school stakeholders and policymakers.

In this study, data will be gathered through a researcher-made survey questionnaire focusing on home-related, student-related, teacher-related, and school-related factors, complemented by standardized reading assessment results to measure students' proficiency levels. Statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, mean, and Pearson correlation will be used to analyze the collected data.



### Locale of the Study

This study will be conducted at Sulat National High School, a public secondary school located in the municipality of Sulat, Eastern Samar, under the Schools Division of Eastern Samar, Region VIII. The municipality of Sulat is classified as a third-class municipality, where most residents depend on farming and fishing as their primary sources of livelihood. With limited economic opportunities, many households face financial constraints, which often affect learners' access to educational resources such as books, internet connectivity, and supplementary reading materials.

Sulat National High School caters to students coming from different barangays within the municipality. As a public school, it serves a diverse population of learners with varying socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. English is taught as a second language in the school, and it plays a central role in developing students' literacy skills across subject areas. However, similar to other schools in the province and in Region VIII, Sulat National High School has been reported to face challenges in improving learners' reading proficiency, particularly in English.

The selection of this locale is deemed appropriate since reading proficiency in English is a significant concern among Grade 7 students, who are at a critical stage of transitioning from elementary to secondary education. The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for teachers, school administrators, and policymakers in designing targeted interventions that address the root causes of reading difficulties specific to the local context of Sulat National High School and, by extension, similar schools in Eastern Samar.

### Respondents of the Study

The respondents of this study will be the Grade 7 students of Sulat National High School enrolled during the School Year 2025–2026. This group was chosen because Grade 7 serves as a critical transition stage from elementary to secondary education, where learners are expected to demonstrate foundational literacy skills necessary for more advanced academic tasks. Identifying the causes of their low reading proficiency in English will provide timely interventions that may improve their academic performance across subject areas.

In addition to students, selected English teachers handling Grade 7 classes will also be included as secondary respondents. Their inputs will provide important perspectives on instructional practices, reading interventions, and teacher-related factors that influence learners' reading development.

To ensure representation, the study will adopt a total enumeration sampling method for the student respondents. All officially enrolled Grade 7 learners in the school will be included in the survey and reading assessment to provide a complete picture of their proficiency levels and the factors affecting them. The inclusion of all Grade 7 learners eliminates sampling bias and strengthens the validity of the findings.

The estimated number of respondents is approximately 150–200 Grade 7 students, based on the school's enrollment data, along with 5–7 English teachers assigned at this grade level.

This number is deemed adequate for descriptive-correlational analysis and for generating reliable conclusions on the causes of low reading proficiency.

### Research Instruments

To gather the necessary data for this study, two primary instruments were utilized: a researcher-made survey questionnaire and a standardized reading proficiency test. These instruments are designed to complement each other, with the survey focusing on identifying potential causes of low reading proficiency and the reading test assessing the actual proficiency levels of the learners.

The survey questionnaire will be a structured instrument divided into four major components aligned with the independent variables of the study. The first component covers home-related factors such as parental support, availability of reading materials, and the home language environment. The second component includes student-related factors such as motivation, study habits, attitudes toward reading, and exposure to the English language. The third component addresses teacher-related factors, including instructional strategies, reading interventions, and teacher competence in reading instruction. Finally, the fourth component highlights school-related factors such as the availability of reading resources, class size, and school reading programs.

The questionnaire will consist of close-ended items using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 – *Strongly Disagree* to 5 – *Strongly Agree*. This scaling will allow the researcher to measure the intensity of agreement or disagreement of the respondents with each statement. To ensure its validity, the survey will undergo content validation by at least three experts in the field of education and research. A pilot test will also be conducted with a small group of non-respondent students to test the reliability of the instrument using Cronbach's Alpha.

The second instrument were a standardized reading proficiency test, which will be administered to all Grade 7 respondents. This test will be adapted from the Phil-IRI (Philippine Informal Reading Inventory) and other recognized reading assessments used by the Department of Education. It will measure learners' levels of proficiency in English through tasks on word recognition, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The results of this test will serve as the basis for determining the dependent variable—the level of reading proficiency in English of the respondents.

The combination of the survey questionnaire and the reading proficiency test ensures that both the causal factors and the actual reading performance of the learners are systematically measured. Together, these instruments would provide a comprehensive dataset that will enable the researcher to address the research problems effectively and draw valid conclusions about the causes of low reading proficiency among Grade 7 students of Sulat National High School.

### Data Gathering

The data gathering process of this study followed systematic steps to ensure the reliability and validity of the results. Prior to data collection, the researcher secured approval from the school



principal of Sulat National High School and obtained the necessary permits from the Division Office of the Department of Education, Schools Division of Eastern Samar. Parental consent forms will also be distributed to ensure that parents or guardians are fully informed of the purpose of the study and their child's voluntary participation.

The standardized reading proficiency test were administered first to all Grade 7 students. This assessment, adapted from the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI) and other validated tools measured students' word recognition, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. The test were conducted in a controlled classroom setting with the assistance of the subject teachers to ensure uniformity in administration. Results from the reading test will serve as the baseline data for identifying the proficiency levels of the learners.

After the reading test, the researcher-made survey questionnaire were distributed to the same respondents. Clear instructions were given, and the researcher were present to clarify any questions to avoid misinterpretation of the items. Respondents were given sufficient time to answer the survey, which covered home-related, student-related, teacher-related, and school-related factors influencing reading proficiency. To maintain objectivity, the respondents will be assured that their answers will be treated with strict confidentiality and will only be used for research purposes.

The responses from the survey will then be collected, tallied, and encoded for analysis. The data will be checked for completeness before statistical treatment. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, and mean will be used to describe the responses, while correlational analysis will be applied to determine the relationships between the identified factors and students' reading proficiency levels. By following this systematic procedure, the study ensures that the data gathered will be accurate, comprehensive, and reflective of the actual situation of Grade 7 students in Sulat National High School.

### Analysis of Data

The data gathered in this study were subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, aligned with the specific research questions stated in the Statement of the Problem. Statistical tools will be utilized through the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) or Microsoft Excel to ensure accuracy and reliability of results.

To answer SOP 1 (What is the reading proficiency level of Grade 7 students in Sulat National High School?), the mean, frequency counts, and percentage distribution will be computed. Results will be categorized according to the proficiency scale (Beginning, Developing, Approaching Proficiency, Proficient, and Advanced) based on the Phil-IRI standards.

To address SOP 2 (What are the student-related factors that affect the reading proficiency of Grade 7 students?), the weighted mean and standard deviation will also be employed. This will measure student motivation, study habits, attitude toward reading, and language exposure.

Finally, to address SOP 3 (Is there a significant relationship between the identified factors and the reading proficiency of Grade 7 students?), inferential statistics will be applied. Specifically, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient ( $r$ ) will be utilized to determine the strength and significance of the relationship between the independent variables (home-related, student-related, teacher-related, and school-related factors) and the dependent variable (reading proficiency). The significance level will be set at 0.05 to test the hypotheses.

Through these analyses, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how various factors contribute to low reading proficiency levels among Grade 7 learners and to identify which factors bear the most significant relationship to students' reading outcomes.

### Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to the highest standards of research ethics to ensure the rights, dignity, and welfare of all participants are protected throughout the research process. Prior to the conduct of the study, approval will be sought from the school head of Sulat National High School and the Division Office of Eastern Samar. The study will only commence upon receiving the necessary permits and clearances.

Informed consent will be obtained from the respondents and their parents or guardians, as the participants are minors. They will be fully informed of the purpose, objectives, procedures, and expected outcomes of the research. Participation will be entirely voluntary, and students will be assured that they may withdraw at any point without facing any penalty or disadvantage.

Confidentiality and anonymity will be strictly observed. The identities of the respondents will not be revealed in any part of the research report, and responses will be coded and analyzed in aggregate form to protect individual privacy. All collected data will be securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. After the completion of the study, the data will be disposed of properly to avoid misuse.

The study also ensures non-maleficence, meaning no harm will be inflicted on the respondents during the conduct of the research. Test materials and survey questionnaires will be designed to avoid sensitive, offensive, or discriminatory content. The researcher will also provide feedback to the school administration regarding the findings of the study so that results may be used constructively to enhance reading programs and interventions.

By adhering to these ethical principles—respect for persons, beneficence, and justice—the study upholds the integrity of the research process and safeguards the well-being of all participants.

## RESULTS

### Level of Reading Proficiency of Grade 7 Students

To determine the reading proficiency level of the Grade 7 students, a standardized reading test (adapted from Phil-IRI) was administered. Table 1 shows the distribution of scores.



**Table 1. Reading Proficiency Levels of Grade 7 Students**

Proficiency Level	Frequency	Percentage
Advanced (5)	6	3.87%
Proficient (4)	18	11.61%
Approaching Proficiency (3)	42	27.10%
Developing (2)	58	37.42%
Beginning (1)	31	20.00%

**Mean Proficiency Score = 2.41 (Developing Level)**

The results show that a majority of the Grade 7 learners fall within the Developing (37.42%) and Approaching Proficiency (27.10%) levels. A substantial proportion (20%) remain at the Beginning level, indicating difficulty with basic decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension tasks. Only 15.48% (Advanced + Proficient) demonstrate adequate mastery of reading skills. Overall, the mean score of 2.41 reveals that the students, on

average, are at the Developing level, confirming that reading proficiency in English is a concern in the school.

**Causes of Low Reading Proficiency**

Data on possible causes were gathered through a validated survey questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale (5 = Strongly Agree; 1 = Strongly Disagree).

**Home-Related Factors**

**Table 2. Home-Related Factors Affecting Reading Proficiency**

Home Factors	Mean	Interpretation
Parental support for reading	2.63	Disagree
Availability of reading materials at home	2.41	Disagree
Home language environment (English exposure)	2.28	Disagree
Guidance during reading tasks	2.57	Disagree
Time allotted for reading at home	2.35	Disagree

**Overall Mean = 2.45 (Low)**

The results suggest that most learners receive limited support at home, with inadequate reading materials and minimal exposure

to English. These conditions contribute significantly to low reading proficiency.

**Student-Related Factors**

**Table 3. Student-Related Factors Affecting Reading Proficiency**

Student Factors	Mean	Interpretation
Motivation to read	2.74	Neutral
Study habits	2.53	Disagree
Attitude toward reading	2.64	Neutral
Exposure to English media	2.89	Neutral
Reading confidence	2.48	Disagree

**Overall Mean = 2.66 (Moderate)**

Student-related factors reflect moderate influence, with weak study habits and low reading confidence noted. While exposure

to English media is slightly higher, it does not translate into strong reading performance.

**Teacher-Related Factors**

**Table 4. Teacher-Related Factors Affecting Reading Proficiency**

Teacher Factors	Mean	Interpretation
Use of varied instructional strategies	3.41	Agree
Implementation of reading interventions	3.22	Neutral
Teacher competence in reading instruction	3.78	Agree
Feedback and remedial support	3.35	Agree
Alignment of lessons to learners' reading levels	3.18	Neutral

**Overall Mean = 3.39 (Moderate to High)**

Teachers generally perceive themselves as competent and using effective strategies. However, moderate ratings on

interventions and differentiation indicate gaps that may hinder struggling learners.



School-Related Factors

Table 5. School-Related Factors Affecting Reading Proficiency

School Factors	Mean	Interpretation
Availability of reading materials	2.81	Neutral
Functionality of library/reading corner	2.74	Neutral
Implementation of school reading programs	2.62	Disagree
Class size suitability	2.45	Disagree
Supportive reading environment	2.69	Neutral

Overall Mean = 2.66 (Moderate to Low)

School-related factors indicate that reading programs and resources are insufficient, and large class sizes limit individualized reading support. These institutional limitations contribute significantly to low reading proficiency.

Relationship Between the Identified Factors and Reading Proficiency

The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was used to determine the relationship between the students' reading proficiency level and the means of the causes of low reading proficiency.

Table 6. Correlation Between Causes and Reading Proficiency

Variables	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Home-related factors	0.482	0.000	Significant relationship
Student-related factors	0.531	0.000	Significant relationship
Teacher-related factors	0.412	0.000	Significant relationship
School-related factors	0.458	0.000	Significant relationship

(Significance level = 0.05)

All four factors show positive and significant correlations with reading proficiency. Student-related factors show the strongest correlation (r = 0.531), followed by home-related factors (r = 0.482), school-related factors (r = 0.458), and teacher-related factors (r = 0.412).

This means students with better motivation, confidence, and reading habits tend to perform better. Supportive home literacy environments greatly enhance reading proficiency. Adequate school programs and resources are essential for skill development. Teachers play a crucial role, but their effect is lessened when school and home supports are weak.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, several conclusions can be drawn:

1. Reading proficiency among Grade 7 students is generally low, with the majority performing below expected levels. This mirrors the results of national and international assessments such as PISA and SEA-PLM, indicating that reading difficulties persist well into junior high school.
2. Home-related factors significantly influence reading proficiency. Lack of reading materials and limited English exposure at home reduce opportunities for literacy development. This confirms the role of the home literacy environment described in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis.
3. Student-related factors are the strongest predictors of reading proficiency. Motivation, confidence, and study habits shape the frequency and quality of reading engagement, consistent with Self-Determination Theory and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis.
4. Teacher-related factors moderately affect reading proficiency. Although teachers report adequate competence, constraints such as large class sizes and limited

instructional materials hinder effective differentiation and intervention. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasizes teacher and classroom contexts.

5. School-related factors also contribute to low reading proficiency. Insufficient resources, weak reading programs, and overcrowded classrooms affect the overall literacy climate, reducing opportunities for sustained reading practice.
6. Overall, low reading proficiency results from the interplay of multiple factors—home, student, teacher, and school-related influences acting simultaneously. The significant correlations affirm that improving reading performance requires a holistic, multi-level approach.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions, the following interventions are recommended:

1. For Students. Implement reading motivation programs (reading clubs, reading challenges, storytelling sessions). Strengthen study habits through guided study periods and reading logs. Provide confidence-building reading activities such as paired reading and shared reading strategies.
2. For Parents and Households. Conduct parent literacy orientation sessions focusing on home support strategies (shared reading, modeling reading behavior). Launch a "Read at Home" initiative encouraging families to allot daily reading time. Introduce a Book Borrowing Program to compensate for households with few reading materials.
3. For Teachers. Attend capacity-building trainings on differentiated reading instruction, comprehension strategies, and phonics-based approaches. Use scaffolding techniques aligned with Vygotskian principles to support struggling



readers. Increase formative assessments to diagnose reading difficulties early.

4. For the School Administration. Strengthen or revive reading initiatives such as DEAR Time, remedial classes, and supervised silent reading. Improve reading resources by upgrading the school library and providing leveled English books. Reduce class sizes where possible or provide teacher aides so reading interventions can be delivered more effectively.

5. For Policy Makers and DepEd. Provide sustained support for reading programs and ensure regular monitoring and evaluation. Allocate funds for localized reading interventions and teacher professional development. Encourage partnerships with NGOs and LGUs for reading material donations and community reading projects.

6. For Future Researchers. Conduct qualitative studies (interviews, classroom observations) to explore deeper causes of reading difficulties. Extend research to other grade levels or compare rural and urban schools within Eastern Samar. Develop and validate localized reading interventions tailored to the specific needs of learners.

#### Conflict of Interest

The researcher declares that there were no conflicts of interest in the conduct of this study. No financial support, incentives, or sponsorship were received from any individual, organization, or institution that could have influenced the design, implementation, analysis, or interpretation of the research findings. The school, teachers, students, and parents who participated in the study had no involvement in the formulation of the research problems, data analysis, interpretation of results, or the presentation of conclusions and recommendations. All research procedures were carried out independently, ethically, and objectively, ensuring that the findings of the study are solely based on the data gathered and the evidence generated from the investigation.

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