

Descriptive Use of Flashcard Media in Elementary School Students' Beginning Reading: Literature Review

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Article history

Submitted: 2026/07/27; Revised: 2026/07/31; Accepted: 2026/08/04

Abstract

A child's literacy success in subsequent levels of education depends heavily on the strength of the reading foundation they build from an early age. The reality on the ground shows a different picture: many early elementary school students still struggle with letter recognition, syllable connection, and even fluently constructing simple sentences. Flashcards are one of the media options often used by teachers to bridge this gap. This article aims to provide an overview of the use of flashcards in early reading instruction in elementary schools, drawing on various published research findings. The paper utilizes a descriptive-qualitative literature review approach, drawing from national journal articles from 2018 to 2025 that address flashcards in the context of early reading. The analysis process involved data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The findings demonstrate a fairly consistent pattern: flashcard use is often associated with increased student ability to recognize letters, combine syllables, read fluently, and pronounce words correctly. The attractive visual appearance and practicality of this medium are key drivers of its success, although on the other hand, obstacles remain, such as limited class time, a limited number of flashcards, and some teachers' reluctance to abandon conventional teaching practices. This paper recommends that flashcards continue to be considered as a simple yet applicable medium for teaching early reading for elementary school teachers.

Keywords

Flashcards, Beginning Reading, Learning Media, Elementary School, Literature Review.



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INTRODUCTION

Reading skills occupy a special position among the four language skills because they serve as the gateway for students to absorb and expand their knowledge throughout their educational journey. Children in grades I and II are generally only at the beginning of their reading journey, learning to recognize letter shapes, combine sounds into syllables, and ultimately understand simple reading content (Muammar, 2020). The foundations laid at this stage will significantly determine academic success;

children who have not mastered these skills are at greater risk of falling behind in literacy in subsequent grades.

Early reading achievement in many elementary schools is less than encouraging. Studies reveal that children in lower grades still struggle with fundamental issues, such as difficulty recognizing letters, confusing similar-shaped letters, and not being able to read short sentences fluently (Rahman and Yulianti, 2023). The causes of these problems are diverse, ranging from children's underdeveloped motivation and interest in learning to teacher teaching methods and the availability of learning aids. This situation encourages teachers to provide concrete and engaging teaching media, in line with the cognitive characteristics of elementary school students, who still require tangible objects to understand concepts.

Flashcards, or picture cards, are among the most frequently chosen media by teachers and have become research objects in early reading instruction. Arsyad (2014:25) defines them as small cards containing images, text, or symbols, with the function of stimulating students' memories of things related to the images. This media's popularity stems from its simplicity, ease of creation, compact format, lack of technical expertise, and flexibility for use both inside and outside the classroom. The visual and concrete aspects of flashcards are well-suited to the learning styles of elementary school-aged children and can also stimulate their curiosity and enthusiasm for reading.

Classroom action research and quasi-experiments highlighting the use of flashcards in early reading instruction have been conducted extensively in various regions, from first to second grade. These research findings are scattered across numerous journals, with varying backgrounds, research designs, and results, resulting in the lack of a comprehensive overview. This information gap is the reason for compiling this article to provide a complete picture of the use of flashcards in early reading learning in elementary schools through a literature review, while also exploring the factors that make it easier or more difficult to implement them in the classroom.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive-qualitative library research method. This method was chosen because the research aimed to collect, analyze, and then re-organize findings from previous research on the use of flashcards in early reading instruction. The materials used were national journal articles, classroom action research reports, and quasi-experiments that addressed the application of flashcards in early reading instruction in elementary schools, published between 2018 and 2025.

Articles were searched through academic search engines using keywords such as flashcards, early reading, and elementary school.

Data processing followed the stages of Miles and Huberman: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Articles that did not address flashcards in the context of early reading were removed during the reduction stage, while relevant articles were retained for further study. The findings from each article were then mapped based on the reading aspect studied, the research design used, and supporting and inhibiting factors in the field. In the final stage, all findings were compiled into a comprehensive overview of the use of flashcards in early reading instruction in elementary schools.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

The search and review of ten relevant scientific articles provided an overview of the characteristics of previous studies concerning the use of flashcard media in early reading instruction for elementary school students. The selected articles were analyzed based on the authors, year of publication, research objectives, participants, research design and methods, principal findings, and research implications. A summary of the literature review is presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Synthesis of the Reviewed Articles

No.	Author(s) (Year)	Research Focus	Method	Main Findings
1	Irmansyah et al. (2025)	Improving early reading skills through flashcard media	Classroom Action Research (observation and tests)	Students' learning mastery increased progressively from 40% (pre- action), to 65% (Cycle I), and 85% (Cycle II).
2	Nurfadillah et al. (2023)	The effectiveness of flashcard media in improving lower-grade	Classroom Action Research (card-matching activities)	Students' early reading skills improved after being accustomed to interactive

		students' reading skills		card-matching activities.
3	Lestari et al. (2021)	The effect of flashcard media on first-grade students' early reading skills	Quantitative (early reading tests)	The use of flashcard media had a positive and significant effect on students' early reading skills.
4	Komariah et al. (2023)	The use of flashcards to overcome reading difficulties among students with dyslexia	Qualitative/Case Study (observation and interviews)	Visual flashcard media effectively helped students with dyslexia recognize letters and words.
5	Maghfiroh & Bahrodin (2022)	The effect of flashcards on improving reading skills among children with dyslexia	Quantitative (experimental reading tests)	Flashcard media had a positive effect on improving letter and syllable recognition among children with dyslexia.
6	Rofiatun & Airlanda (2024)	Development of flashcard media for first-grade students' early reading instruction	Research and Development (R&D) (validation and field testing)	The developed flashcard product was proven to be valid, feasible, and effective in improving early reading skills.
7	Sinaga & Nasution (2024)	The effectiveness of flashcard media in improving second-grade	Quantitative experimental (post-test)	Students taught using illustrated flashcards achieved a higher mean post-test

		students' reading skills		score (82.33) than those using plain cards (66.00).
8	Rahman & Yulianti (2023)	Analyzing challenges and solutions in early literacy and beginning reading	Literature Review/Descriptive Study	The use of concrete and visual media, such as flashcards, was identified as an effective solution to letter-recognition difficulties.
9	Arsyad (2014)	The concept and function of flashcard media in learning	Theoretical/Conceptual Review	Flashcards effectively stimulate students' memory through image-text associations and are practical instructional media.
10	Muammar (2020)	Stages of reading development and strategies for early reading in elementary schools	Conceptual Review	Recognition of letters and syllables is the fundamental prerequisite for fluent reading and requires the support of concrete learning media.

Source: Authors' Synthesis Of The Reviewed Literature.

The data presented in **Table 1** indicate that most of the reviewed studies employed quantitative, experimental, or Classroom Action Research (CAR)

approaches to evaluate the effectiveness of flashcard media in reading instruction (Irmansyah et al., 2025:788; Sinaga & Nasution, 2024:570). These research designs generally involved implementing flashcard-based learning as an instructional intervention and subsequently comparing students' learning outcomes, reading fluency, and responses before and after the intervention. Such approaches provide evidence regarding the contribution of visual instructional media to improving the quality of reading instruction in elementary schools.

The literature review further demonstrates that the use of flashcard media has a positive impact on various aspects of early reading development (Lestari et al., 2021:115). Previous studies consistently reported improvements in letter recognition, syllable blending, reading fluency, and pronunciation accuracy among students (Rofiatun & Airlanda, 2024:506). The presentation of learning materials through visual and practical media creates a more engaging learning environment, thereby encouraging students to participate more actively in classroom learning activities.

Overall, the findings from the reviewed studies indicate that flashcards have considerable potential as an effective instructional medium for use in elementary schools. The results of this literature review provide a foundation for discussing the effectiveness of flashcard media in enhancing early reading skills while supporting the implementation of more innovative, interactive, and student-centered learning processes.

Discussion

The literature review indicates that the use of flashcards has significant potential to improve the quality of early reading instruction in elementary schools. Visual learning media, presented in the form of picture cards, can create a more engaging learning environment than conventional learning. Elementary school students' tendency to prefer visual and concrete activities makes flashcards an appropriate medium to help them understand the concept of letter symbols while increasing engagement during the learning process. Presenting material through images and text makes it easier for students to focus, making the learning process more effective.

Early reading materials emphasize not only letter recognition but also sound integration, reading fluency, and pronunciation accuracy. Lecture-based or non-media-based instruction often results in students passively receiving information, making learning less engaging. The use of flashcards provides a more interactive learning alternative because students can learn through various activities, such as matching cards, pronouncing words, and stringing syllables together (Nurfadillah et

al., 2023:2632). This learning experience helps students grasp reading concepts concretely.

The use of flashcards benefits teachers in implementing early reading instruction. Teachers have the opportunity to present material in a more creative and varied way through various card games. This type of student-centered learning allows students to explore words independently while enhancing interaction between teachers and students throughout the learning process.

The compact, portable, and practical characteristics of flashcards are key factors in increasing learning effectiveness. Engaging visual displays create a fun learning experience, preventing students from getting bored easily. Positive learning experiences build students' confidence in reading. This indirectly contributes to increased reading fluency because students find the learning easier to understand.

Literature reviews show that flashcards are not only beneficial for regular students but are also effective for students with special needs, such as those with dyslexia (Komariah et al., 2023:58-36; Maghfiroh and Bahrodin, 2022:72). The relationship between visual media and memory suggests that presenting letter shapes accompanied by concrete images helps dyslexic children recognize and differentiate similar letters. Beginning reading lessons utilizing flashcards help students master basic language concepts more optimally.

The limitations of this study lie in the use of a desk study method that relies on data from previous research without direct field observations. The results obtained reflect general trends across various studies, and therefore do not fully reflect the learning conditions in every elementary school. Differences in student characteristics, limited time allocation, the number of cards available, and teachers' conventional teaching habits can influence the effectiveness of using flashcards in the classroom.

The overall discussion indicates that flashcards have the potential to be an innovative learning medium capable of improving elementary school students' beginning reading skills. The use of visual media combined with a variety of teaching strategies can create a more engaging, enjoyable, and meaningful learning environment. The results of this study can serve as a reference for teachers developing concrete media-based learning and serve as a basis for further research testing the effectiveness of flashcards through experimental research with a wider sample size.

CONCLUSION

The use of flashcards has the potential to positively impact early reading instruction in elementary schools, based on the results of a literature review. Flashcard-based learning media can improve students' reading skills by presenting

material that is more engaging, interactive, and tailored to the developmental characteristics of students. The visual appearance and practicality of this media make students more active, enthusiastic, and confident in recognizing letters, connecting syllables, and pronouncing words. The use of flashcards helps students understand reading material more easily and is flexible for application to children with special learning needs such as dyslexia. Flashcards can be a concise and easy-to-implement alternative learning medium for teachers to create student-centered learning. Most of the studies reviewed still have limitations in context and sample size. Further field research is recommended to use a pure experimental or quasi-experimental design with a wider sample size to measure

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