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Effectiveness of Big Book Media in Elementary School Language Learning: A Literature Review

Talitha Septia*, Abna Hidayati
Universitas Negeri Padang, Padang, Indonesia
*Corresponding E-mail: talithaseptia@gmail.com

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Abstract: The literacy skills of elementary school students, especially in lower grades, remain a serious concern in the world of education in Indonesia. Low interest in reading and limited attractive learning media drive the need for innovation in the use of media that are appropriate to the characteristics of child development. One media that is considered relevant is the Big Book, a large book with striking writing and images designed for classical reading learning. This article aims to analyze and synthesize previous research findings related to the implementation of Big Book media in language learning in elementary schools. The method used is a narrative review of 7 primary source articles and 10 secondary supporting reference articles obtained through Google Scholar with the main keyword "penggunaan media big book". Empirical evidence suggests that the utilization of 'Big Book' instructional materials facilitates a multifaceted array of pedagogical outcomes. Specifically, it enhances critical thinking, while simultaneously fostering character development through narrative-driven ethical instruction. Moreover, this medium effectively promotes foundational linguistic competence, lexical expansion, and student engagement within a conducive and stimulating learning environment. The effectiveness of Big Book in enhancing literacy competencies can be attributed to its visually appealing features, its capacity to facilitate shared reading activities, and its interactive nature, which encourages active student participation throughout the learning process. These results indicate that 'Big Book' media serves as an appropriate instructional tool for elementary education, significantly contributing to the enhancement of literacy standards from the foundational stages of learning.

Keywords: *big book, language learning, elementary school, literacy, learning media*

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INTRODUCTION

Literacy skills constitute a fundamental basis for the development of high-quality human resources. Literacy encompasses three main dimensions: the ability to read and write, competence in specific areas of knowledge or expertise, and the capacity to process information and apply knowledge effectively to meet the demands of everyday life (Kancanadana & Rahmawati, 2023). Reading literacy constitutes a fundamental competency that enables students to access, interpret, and apply information obtained from diverse sources effectively. However, existing educational practices have not fully addressed the development of students' reading competence and reading interest (Baharizky et al., 2024). This problem is particularly significant among lower-grade elementary students, who are still developing basic reading abilities. Challenges at this early stage may accumulate over time and adversely affect students' academic achievement and learning progression in later stages of schooling.

One key issue in early-grade reading instruction is the lack of learning media that are both engaging for students and suitable for their developmental needs. In many classroom practices, literacy instruction continues to depend heavily on conventional reading resources, while activities related to cultural literacy and reading literacy are generally implemented through standard reading books. Such resources often lack interactive and appealing features, which may limit students' participation and reduce their motivation to engage in literacy-based learning (Kancanadana & Rahmawati, 2023). This limitation drives the need for innovation in developing media that is more engaging, interactive, and able to accommodate the learning characteristics of elementary school-aged children who require multisensory stimulation.

Lower-grade elementary students are generally at a cognitive developmental stage in which learning is more effective when supported by concrete and visual instructional materials. Visual literacy involves more than simply recognizing images; it includes the ability to interpret visual aspects such as image positioning, color, size, and composition, which contribute to the formation of meaning (Maine & McCaughran, 2021). In this regard, integrating creative and innovative learning media is recommended as a strategy to address instructional challenges, as it can promote a more engaging and enjoyable learning environment (Hidayati et al., 2024). Within reading instruction, visually rich media containing colorful images and illustrations can help students comprehend textual information more easily. Visual elements act as a bridge between abstract written concepts and children's concrete experiences, allowing students to develop a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the reading material.

A Big Book is a large-format learning medium developed to support whole-class shared reading in the classroom. Through its enlarged size, students are able to view the text and illustrations at the same time as the teacher reads and facilitates discussion. Similar to posters that utilize visual design, color, and message arrangement to draw attention and deliver

information effectively (Baharizky et al., 2024). Big Books adopt related visual principles by presenting enlarged texts alongside vivid illustrations that support students' engagement and comprehension. These features are intended to enhance student engagement, maintain attention, and facilitate a more effective understanding of the story content.

Big Books possess distinctive features that differentiate them from conventional reading materials. These characteristics include large and easily visible text, colorful and engaging illustrations, and simple storylines that are appropriate for the comprehension level of lower-grade elementary school students. Such features make Big Books particularly effective in supporting early literacy development and enhancing students' reading engagement. These characteristics are in line with the principles of visual literacy which emphasize that visual elements such as placement, color, image size, and composition provide important clues to the intended meaning (Maine & McCaughran, 2021). Through the use of large print and prominent illustrations, Big Books enable students to develop text decoding skills and visual comprehension simultaneously. As a result, the reading process becomes more integrated and comprehensive, allowing students to construct meaning from both textual and visual information.

Big Books are particularly well suited to the learning characteristics of elementary school students, who benefit most from concrete, visually supported, and interactive learning experiences. Their design accommodates the developmental needs of young learners by providing meaningful opportunities for engagement and active participation in the learning process. The use of visual texts in learning enables children to engage in meaningful dialogue, where they collaboratively construct meaning from the narrative and connect its themes to their own lives, values, and identities (Maine & McCaughran, 2021). Ambiguous and visually stimulating visual texts have been shown to create a dialogic ethos in the classroom, where children feel included and learn to be tolerant and empathetic toward one another's ideas (Maine & McCaughran, 2021). Thus, Big Books not only support the development of technical reading skills but also facilitate the development of students' critical thinking and social-emotional skills.

Several empirical studies have examined Big Book media, and a small number of reviews have begun to consolidate this literature. Muzdalifah and Subrata (2022) reviewed research-and-development studies on Big Books based on local wisdom and concluded that they support early reading among first-grade students. Jannah et al. (2025) in a PRISMA-guided systematic review of 12 articles published between 2019 and 2024, examined Big Book media for speaking and listening in early childhood education and identified both benefits and implementation challenges, such as limited teacher training and a lack of culturally relevant materials.

However, these reviews leave several gaps. First, each concentrates on a single skill and setting: early reading through development studies in the first grade (Muzdalifah & Subrata,

2022), or speaking and listening in early childhood education rather than elementary school (Jannah et al., 2025). Second, primary studies on Big Books in elementary language learning are spread across different outcomes, including beginning reading, vocabulary, speaking, critical thinking, character, and reading interest, and are typically reported one outcome at a time. It therefore remains unclear how these outcomes relate to one another and whether they can be traced to a shared set of design features and instructional principles. Third, less attention has been paid to how consistently each outcome is supported across studies and where the evidence is thin. To the best of our knowledge, a review is needed that integrates these outcomes and principles for language learning in elementary schools.

A narrative review is well suited to address this gap. The Big Book literature combines diverse designs, such as development research with validity and practicality testing and classroom action research, which differ in outcomes and measures and may make statistical pooling impractical. Such a body of work calls for an interpretive synthesis that compares findings across studies and identifies common principles. This review therefore contributes (a) a consolidated picture of the outcomes of Big Book use across language skills in elementary school, (b) an account of the design features and instructional principles that recur across studies, and (c) an indication of where the evidence is strong and where further research is needed. For teachers and media developers, this synthesis offers a basis for choosing and designing Big Books more deliberately rather than treating them as a generic reading aid.

Accordingly, this article aims to synthesize research on the use of Big Book media in language learning in elementary schools. It addresses three questions: (1) What learning outcomes are reported when Big Books are used in elementary language learning? (2) Which design features and instructional principles are associated with these outcomes? (3) How consistent is the evidence, and where are the gaps for future research?

METHOD

This study employed the narrative review method, a literature review approach aimed at describing, summarizing, and synthesizing the findings of various relevant studies narratively. This approach was chosen because it enabled researchers to obtain a comprehensive overview of the implementation of Big Book media in language learning in elementary schools based on the results of previous research.

Literature search was conducted through the Google Scholar database using the keyword "penggunaan media big book", "media big book kemampuan bercerita", "media big book berpikir kritis". To ensure the relevance and novelty of the study, the search was limited to articles published within the last ten years, namely from 2015 to 2025. The inclusion criteria were established as follows: (1) the articles reported empirical research findings or conceptual

analyses related to the implementation of Big Book media in elementary school settings; (2) the articles were written in Indonesian or English; and (3) the full texts were accessible to enable detailed analysis. The exclusion criteria were: (1) review articles, (2) not available full text, (3) not in elementary level, (4) articles published before 2015.

Articles were chosen purposively which constitutes a limitation of this study, seven articles met the eligibility criteria and were selected as the primary sources for this study. The selected studies were carefully reviewed and analyzed to extract recurring themes, including outcomes related to foundational literacy; oral language, critical thinking, and character; students' interest, motivation, and classroom interaction; and the design features and instructional principles that explain the effectiveness of Big Book media. The results of the analysis were subsequently synthesized narratively to answer the objectives of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This review synthesizes findings from seven studies on the use of Big Book media in elementary language instruction (Table 1). Four themes emerged: (1) foundational literacy, (2) oral language, critical thinking, and character, (3) interest, motivation, and classroom atmosphere, and (4) the design features and instructional principles that explain why Big Books are effective.

Table 1. Findings on the use of Big Book media in elementary language instruction

No	Author (year)	Focus of findings	Design, participants, and setting
1	Sulaiman (2017)	Large print and visuals support letter recognition and comprehension; shared reading; whole-class atmosphere	Pre-experimental, early-grade student, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri Banta-Bantaeng, Makassar
2	Handayani et al. (2025)	Practicality of media use, effectively improving storytelling skills	R&D, second grade students, SDS Muhammadiyah 36 Medan
3	Pamela et al. (2019)	Critical thinking: asking questions, analyzing situations, active participation; interactivity	Classroom Action Research, fifth grade students, SD Negeri 13/I Rengas Condong, Batang Hari
4	Nurika et al. (2022)	Instilling the character values of a love for reading and a sense of responsibility through the methods of habituation and leading by example.	R&D, second grade students, SDN 19 Mataram
5	Syaputra et al. (2023)	Reading interest and motivation through colorful illustrations and predictable storylines	Descriptive qualitative, second grade students, SD Muhammadiyah 7 Surabaya
6	Mardiyanti et al. (2022)	Higher reading comprehension scores after implementation	Classroom Action Research, third grade students, SDN Cibaregbeg, Sukabumi
7	Ritonga and Rambe (2022)	Letter and word recognition; benefit for low-literacy students; whole-class interaction	Descriptive qualitative, second grade students, SD Yayasan Perguruan Swakarya

Foundational literacy

Three of the even studies converge on the view that Big Books support the earliest stages of reading. Sulaiman (2017) and Ritonga and Rambe (2022) both attribute this to the physical format: large print and prominent illustrations make letters, words, and sentences easier for early-grade students to recognize, and Ritonga and Rambe (2022) add that the striking visuals ease the first reading difficulties of students with low literacy skills. At the level of comprehension, Mardiyanti et al. (2022) higher reading comprehension scores after Big Books were implemented. Taken together, these studies describe a progression from visual access to print to the construction of meaning.

Storytelling, critical thinking, and character

In addition to early reading skills, the studies describe Big Books as a starting point for productive language use. Handayani et al. (2025) implements the use of Big Book by first demonstrating the correct way to read a story, after which students are asked to come to the front of the class to tell the story using the demonstrated method. Two studies link Big Books to critical thinking. Pamela et al. (2019) describe students asking questions, analyzing situations in the story, and responding to problems rather than remaining passive recipients of information, and Mardiyanti et al. (2022) connect this active engagement to fuller reading comprehension. Character development, by contrast, is reported by only one study in this set Nurika et al. (2022) study on developing Big Book media by instilling the character values of a love for reading and responsibility through habituation and role modeling. The value of a love for reading is fostered by making reading a habit before lessons begin; students are given the opportunity to read the Big Book in front of the class. The stories within the Big Book feature characters who demonstrate responsibility, serving as examples for the students to emulate. Because this evidence comes from a single study and refers to specially designed content, the character effect may depend on how story content is developed rather than on the Big Book format alone, which warrants further research.

Interest, motivation, and classroom atmosphere

Three studies emphasize the affective and social side of Big Book use. Syaputra et al. (2023) attribute increased reading interest and motivation to colorful illustrations and predictable story structures, noting that these features attract students' attention better than regular textbooks, which is especially relevant where low reading interest is the main problem. Sulaiman (2017) and Ritonga and Rambe (2022) focus on the shared nature of the experience: because the book is large enough for the whole class to see, reading becomes a collective activity that builds closeness between teachers and students and among students Sulaiman (2017) and sustains active teacher-student interaction (Ritonga & Rambe, 2022). In this shared setting, teachers can also model correct reading directly to all students (Sulaiman, 2017). The first study

locates motivation in the visual and narrative qualities of the book, whereas the other two locate it in the shared reading situation that the format makes possible. These explanations are complementary rather than competing.

Design features and instructional principles

The studies also offer explanations for why Big Books work, and three principles recur. The first is readability and visualization: text should be large and clear enough to be seen by all students, accompanied by images that support the text so that students can grasp the meaning of the story without spelling out every word (Sulaiman, 2017). The second is psychological factor: students in lower grades are associated with learning materials featuring large images and text, as well as attractive colors (Ritonga & Rambe, 2022). The third is interactivity: media should stimulate active participation through questions, discussion, and reflective responses (Pamela et al., 2019). The researchers also report practical reasons for choosing the medium, namely its suitability for lower grades in the literacy transition stage and as an alternative for students who struggle with reading and writing (Sulaiman, 2017), its fit with whole-class learning (Ritonga & Rambe, 2022), and boost students' enthusiasm for reading (Nurika et al., 2022). These principles can be read as corresponding to the outcomes above: readability to early decoding, the concrete-visual principle to vocabulary and comprehension, and interactivity to critical thinking.

Across the seven studies, the most consistent findings concern early reading, reading comprehension, and reading interest, which are supported by more than one study and by explanations that point in the same direction. Other outcomes, namely instilling character values (Nurika et al., 2022), rest on a single study and should be treated as preliminary. In addition, all studies in this set report positive outcomes, and none reports null or negative findings. This may reflect real effectiveness, but it may also reflect the narrow, non-systematic way the articles were selected, a limitation discussed in the Conclusion.

Discussion

The findings indicate that the implementation of Big Book media provides a meaningful contribution to the strengthening of students' early literacy competencies. This finding is supported by the study conducted by Ramdhani et al. (2021), which reported that Big Book media can foster various aspects of children's language development, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Similarly, the study by Antariani et al. (2021) demonstrated that Big Books are effective in enhancing early literacy abilities. In particular, Big Book media can be used as a meaningful pedagogical resource to foster beginning reading skills in young learners, encompassing letter identification, syllable and word reading, as well as comprehension of simple sentence structures.

Big Book media also contributes to the development of students' speaking and communication skills. According to Septiyani and Kurniah (2017), the implementation of Big Books encourages children to participate more actively in verbal interactions, express their thoughts and ideas more confidently, and communicate more effectively with others. These opportunities for interaction support the enhancement of oral language proficiency and overall communication competence. In line with the results of Karyadi's (2018) Classroom Action Research (CAR), speaking skills increased from 34.89% in pre-action to 71.03% in Cycle II after implementing the storytelling method with Big Book. The use of Big Book media represents an engaging and enjoyable instructional approach that promotes children's curiosity, attention, and active participation in the learning process. Khasanah et al. (2022) noted that Big Books, characterized by their large size and colorful illustrations, serve as effective visual stimuli that capture children's interest and encourage them to ask questions more frequently. Such interactions contribute to the development of speaking skills and support greater engagement in classroom communication activities.

The Big Book media plays a role in improving critical thinking skills. Dyah (2023) explains that Big Book media is a visual medium that is easy to use and can improve students' critical thinking skills because its unique and creative form stimulates curiosity. As an instructional resource, Big Books facilitate the presentation of information through a combination of textual and visual elements. This allows students to analyze content, identify key ideas, and generate summaries, thereby fostering active involvement and cognitive engagement in the learning process (Dyah, 2023).

The Big Book acts as a medium for character formation. Syafira and Damayanti (2021) concluded that Big Book media is highly valid and practical for strengthening students' character during the learning process, based on the results of validation tests and high practicality. This is in line with research on the Big Book entitled "Doyan Nada," which was found to be effective in increasing student engagement in reading and learning character values, demonstrating positive responses across various visual aspects, text comprehension, interactivity, emotional engagement, and reader reactions (Anggana et al., 2025).

Big Book media has been shown to enhance students' interest in reading as well as their motivation to learn. The study conducted by Prawiyogi et al. (2021) demonstrated that the implementation of Big Books in lower elementary grades effectively promoted students' reading interest. Their findings further indicated that learning activities supported by Big Book media encouraged greater enthusiasm and active participation among students compared to conventional instruction without the use of learning media. Accordingly, increased learner engagement contributed to the strengthening of students' reading interest.

The use of Big Book media appears to support the improvement of students' reading comprehension skills. This finding is in line with Johan and Ghasya (2018), who reported that Big Book-based instruction effectively enhanced reading comprehension, as indicated by significant improvements in students' post-test results. The study further confirmed that the media was practical and feasible for classroom application. Observations of both teacher and student activities showed good to very good levels of engagement and performance throughout the learning process.

CONCLUSIONS

This review synthesized research on the use of Big Book media in elementary school language learning. Based on the seven primary studies and the supporting literature, the conclusions are organized around three pillars: the main theoretical synthesis, the practical and pedagogical implications, and the limitations of the review together with directions for future research.

Main theoretical synthesis. The reviewed studies do not describe isolated gains but a connected progression of outcomes. Large print and prominent illustrations first give students visual access to print, which supports letter and word recognition and early decoding. This access then supports reading comprehension, and the shared reading situation extends it to storytelling, critical thinking, reading interest, and motivation. Three design principles recur across the studies and help explain this progression: readability and visualization, the psychological principle that lower-grade students learn best from large, colorful, and concrete materials, and interactivity through questions, discussion, and reflective responses. What distinguishes the Big Book from conventional reading materials is that its enlarged format allows the whole class to attend to the same text and images at once, so that visual meaning-making, teacher modeling, and dialogue take place together. The evidence is most consistent for early reading, reading comprehension, and reading interest. Other outcomes, particularly character development, rest on fewer studies, and may depend on how the story content is developed rather than on the Big Book format alone; they should therefore be regarded as preliminary.

Practical and pedagogical implications. For teachers in the lower grades, the Big Book is best used as a shared reading medium, and it appears especially useful for students who still struggle with the first stages of reading. The three recurring principles can serve as a practical checklist when choosing or designing a Big Book: text that is large and clear enough for all students to see, illustrations and predictable storylines that support the text, and built-in opportunities for questioning, discussion, and retelling. Teachers can model fluent reading first and then invite students to read or retell the story themselves, and can pair the book with open

questions when the aim is to stimulate critical thinking. For media developers and teachers who create their own materials, moral values and local stories should be embedded deliberately in the narrative if character education is among the learning goals. Treated this way, the Big Book is a purposefully designed instructional tool rather than a generic reading aid.

Limitations and directions for future research. This review has several limitations. The seven primary articles were selected purposively from a single database using a small set of keywords, and no formal quality appraisal was conducted. The included studies vary in design, from pre-experimental and classroom action research to descriptive and development studies, and most involve small classes in specific local settings, which limits generalization. All of them report positive outcomes, which may reflect real effectiveness but may also reflect selective reporting and the narrow selection of articles. Future research should therefore (a) conduct systematic reviews with a transparent protocol, multiple databases, and explicit quality assessment; (b) use controlled or quasi-experimental designs with comparison groups and delayed post-tests to test effectiveness more rigorously; (c) examine under-researched outcomes such as vocabulary, writing, and character development, and separate the effect of the Big Book format from the effect of story content; and (d) investigate teacher preparation, culturally relevant content, and digital forms of Big Books as conditions for effective implementation.

Author's Declaration:

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Author Contribution Statement: TS conceptualized the review, identified and selected the literature, extracted and synthesized the data, wrote the original draft, and revised the manuscript. AB supervised the review process and provided guidance. Both authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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