

A Systematic Literature Review on The Effectiveness of The Teams Games Tournament (TGT) Model with Flashcard Media in Enhancing Early Reading Skills in Elementary School Students

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Abstract. Early reading ability is a fundamental literacy skill that underpins students' success in subsequent learning stages. However, numerous studies indicate that many elementary school students still struggle with early reading, particularly in letter recognition, syllable decoding, and basic comprehension. One promising approach to address this issue is the integration of the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) learning model with flashcard media. This study aims to systematically review research findings on the effectiveness of the TGT model assisted by flashcards in improving early reading skills among elementary school students. The study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method following the PRISMA guidelines, analyzing articles published between 2014 and 2025 from databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, and ScienceDirect. From an initial pool of 134 articles, 25 met the inclusion criteria and were further analyzed. The findings reveal that the integration of the TGT model and flashcard media effectively enhances students' learning motivation, engagement, and early reading proficiency, particularly in letter and word recognition. Most studies employed quasi-experimental designs using pretest-posttest methods. Thematic analysis identified four major research focuses: (1) the effectiveness of the TGT model on reading outcomes, (2) the pedagogical role of flashcards in interactive learning, (3) implementation strategies of TGT in lower-grade classrooms, and (4) challenges faced by teachers in game-based learning application. The review also highlights several research gaps, including intervention duration, school context diversity, and long-term retention measurement. This SLR provides valuable insights for educators and researchers in designing innovative and effective instructional models to improve early reading skills in elementary education

Keywords: Teams Games Tournament (TGT), flashcard, early reading skills, elementary education,.

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Reading is universally recognized as the foundation of early literacy development and a critical predictor of later academic success. For young learners, the mastery of early reading skills forms the cognitive and linguistic basis that supports proficiency across subjects. According to Sulisty (2018), early reading involves not only the mechanical ability to recognize letters and words but also the capacity to derive meaning from simple texts. However, despite the strong emphasis on foundational literacy in Indonesia's *Kurikulum Merdeka*, many early-grade students continue to struggle with phonemic awareness, syllable blending, and basic comprehension (Kurniawati & Sari, 2020).

Findings from PISA 2022 and OECD assessments (OECD, 2023) further confirm that Indonesian students' reading abilities remain below international benchmarks, with early reading identified as a persistent weakness. These early literacy gaps, if not addressed, can lead to long-term academic challenges, reduced learning motivation, and limited cognitive development.

In response to these issues, educators have sought innovative instructional methods that promote active engagement and meaningful learning. One promising approach is the Teams

Games Tournament (TGT) model introduced by Slavin (1995), which integrates teamwork and academic games to reinforce learning. When combined with flashcard media—visual tools that enhance phonemic awareness, decoding, and vocabulary retention (Yuliana & Hapsari, 2021)—instruction becomes more interactive, enjoyable, and cognitively supportive.

However, despite a growing body of research on TGT and flashcards, empirical findings remain fragmented. Existing studies typically examine TGT or flashcards in isolation, with limited comprehensive analysis on how these two strategies function together to improve early reading. Moreover, previous research shows considerable variation in methodology, target skills, sample characteristics, and evaluation metrics, making it difficult to determine the overall effectiveness of the combined approach. To date, no systematic review has mapped trends, synthesized findings, or identified research gaps regarding the integration of TGT and flashcard media in early reading instruction.

Therefore, this study conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesize empirical evidence, analyze methodological patterns, identify thematic trends, and evaluate the effectiveness of integrating TGT and flashcards in strengthening early reading skills in elementary school students. This review also aims to highlight specific research gaps that can guide future investigations and support the development of more effective early literacy interventions.

1.2 Theoretical Context

Theoretically, this study is grounded in constructivist learning theory, which positions learning as an active, socially mediated process (Vygotsky, 1978). Cooperative learning models such as TGT are aligned with this perspective because they encourage learners to co-construct meaning through dialogue, shared responsibilities, and structured peer interaction. Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec (1998) argue that cooperative learning fosters positive interdependence and accountability, which can enhance deeper comprehension. However, empirical studies applying TGT demonstrate methodological variations that influence the robustness of these claims. For instance, Sari and Wulandari (2020) employed a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest design with adequate sample control, while other studies used small sample sizes or lacked random assignment, thereby limiting generalizability.

The use of flashcards, on the other hand, is theoretically supported by Paivio's Dual Coding Theory (1990), which states that information processed simultaneously through verbal and visual pathways enhances memory and comprehension. Several studies (e.g., Rahmawati, 2021; Abdulrahman & Adebayo, 2021) confirm that flashcards improve phonemic awareness and word recognition. Nonetheless, inconsistencies emerge in research outcomes due to differences in instructional duration, the type of flashcards used (digital vs. physical), and teacher facilitation. Some studies report significant improvement, whereas others indicate only moderate gains when flashcards are used without interactive scaffolding.

Integrating TGT and flashcards theoretically provides complementary benefits: TGT strengthens social interaction and motivation, while flashcards reinforce cognitive processing and retention. However, the effectiveness of this integration is influenced by contextual factors that many studies have not addressed thoroughly. These include teacher competence in orchestrating game-based learning, classroom management challenges during competitive activities, the availability of media resources, and the varying literacy backgrounds of students. Such contextual variables may explain why some studies show strong effects of TGT–flashcard interventions, while others report only partial improvement.

Furthermore, although prior studies claim that TGT and flashcards enhance early literacy, their methodological rigor varies considerably. Several articles lack detailed reporting of reliability measures, effect sizes, or long-term retention tests, limiting the ability to draw strong causal conclusions. Research gaps also remain underexplored, particularly regarding how socioeconomic status, linguistic diversity, and classroom environment moderate the effectiveness of TGT and flashcard-based instruction.

By critically assessing these inconsistencies, this study seeks to synthesize not only the effectiveness but also the contextual constraints and methodological limitations of previous research, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of how TGT and flashcards can be optimally implemented in early literacy instruction.

1.3 Empirical Background

Over the past decade, various empirical studies have examined the use of the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) model and flashcard media in early literacy instruction, indicating generally positive outcomes. For example, Tanti Dwi (2020) reported that TGT combined with flashcards improved second graders' word recognition and early critical thinking skills, while Lestari (2022) found that this integration strengthened syllabic fluency and student engagement. Ramdani and Nurhayati (2023) emphasized the role of flashcards in enhancing vocabulary retention through visual reinforcement, and Hidayat (2018) demonstrated improvements in letter–sound correspondence.

Despite these encouraging findings, the existing body of literature remains fragmented and methodologically inconsistent. A large proportion of studies use small sample sizes, short intervention periods, and quasi-experimental designs without randomization, which limits the internal validity and generalizability of results. Only a few studies report reliability indices, inter-rater agreement, or detailed descriptions of assessment tools used to measure early reading outcomes. Moreover, although individual studies focus on either TGT or flashcards, comprehensive analyses that synthesize their combined effects are still limited. These gaps highlight the need for a systematic and methodologically transparent review to capture broader evidence patterns across diverse research contexts.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

In response to these gaps, the present study aims to conduct a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to evaluate empirical evidence on the effectiveness of the TGT model integrated with flashcard media for improving early reading skills among elementary school students. Specifically, the study intends to:

1. Identify, evaluate, and synthesize findings from empirical studies on TGT and flashcards in early reading instruction.
2. Analyze variations in methodological quality, including sample characteristics, research design rigor, assessment tools, and reliability indicators.
3. Examine contextual factors that influence intervention outcomes, such as teacher competence, classroom environment, and student demographic characteristics.

Through this analysis, the review seeks to contribute theoretically by refining understanding of cooperative and visual learning processes and practically by offering evidence-based guidance for literacy instruction in early-grade classrooms.

METHOD

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach with a descriptive qualitative orientation. The SLR method was chosen because it provides a structured, replicable, and transparent framework for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing empirical research. Unlike narrative reviews, SLR imposes explicit procedures for selecting, screening, and assessing studies, thereby reducing potential bias.

To improve methodological transparency, this study incorporated a quality appraisal stage in which each article was evaluated based on:

- **Sample size and participant characteristics** (e.g., adequacy for statistical testing, age range, grade level),
- **Research design rigor** (e.g., use of control groups, randomization, pretest–posttest structure),
- **Instrument validity and reliability** (e.g., reported Cronbach’s alpha, inter-rater reliability, standardized reading assessments),
- **Clarity of intervention procedures** (duration, learning materials, teacher involvement).

Only studies meeting minimum quality thresholds were retained for final synthesis.

The overall review followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol, which includes the stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and final inclusion.

2.2. Data Sources and Search Strategy

The data for this review were obtained from several major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar, to ensure comprehensive coverage of both international and Indonesian research contexts. The search was conducted using Boolean combinations of keywords such as:

“Teams Games Tournament” OR “TGT” AND “flashcard” AND “early reading” AND “elementary school” OR “primary education.”

To capture the most recent trends, the time frame for inclusion was limited to studies published between 2015 and 2025. The search was also expanded to include open-access journals, national accredited journals (SINTA-indexed), and conference proceedings that met the required methodological standards. Reference lists of selected articles were cross-checked to identify additional relevant studies that might not have appeared in the initial database search.

All retrieved records were imported into Mendeley for organization and duplicate removal. A total of 134 studies were initially identified. After removing duplicates and non-empirical publications, 78 studies remained for abstract and full-text screening. Following the PRISMA process, only 25 studies met the final inclusion criteria and were analyzed in depth.

2.3. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

A study was included if it met all of the following requirements:

1. Focused on the application of TGT and/or flashcard media in early reading instruction.
2. Involved elementary school students in Grades 1–3 (ages 6–9).
3. Employed an empirical design (quasi-experimental, experimental, classroom action research, or mixed-method).
4. Reported sufficient methodological detail, including sample size, intervention procedures, and reading assessment measures.
5. Used valid and reliable instruments, either standardized tests or tools with reported reliability indices.
6. Published in a peer-reviewed journal (English or Indonesian) between 2015 and 2025.

Exclusion Criteria

Studies were excluded if they:

- Lacked empirical data or used non-systematic observations,
- Did not report sample characteristics or assessment procedures clearly,
- Used inadequate methodological detail (e.g., missing pretest–posttest data),
- Discussed cooperative learning or visual media without examining early reading skills,
- Appeared in non-peer-reviewed sources (blogs, theses, unpublished reports).

These revised criteria strengthen transparency and ensure that only studies with acceptable methodological rigor contribute to the synthesis.

2.4. Data Extraction and Coding Process

Data extraction was conducted manually to ensure accuracy and contextual sensitivity. For each study, key information was recorded, including **author(s)**, **year of publication**, **research design**, **sample size**, **educational setting**, **measured variables**, and **main outcomes**.

A coding framework was developed based on recurring themes found in the literature. The main coding categories were:

1. **Type of intervention** (Teams Games Tournament alone or Teams Games Tournament + flashcards)
2. **Targeted reading skill** (phonemic awareness, word recognition, comprehension, etc.)
3. **Research design** (quasi-experimental, classroom action research, descriptive)
4. **Outcome effectiveness** (highly effective, effective, less effective)
5. **Contextual factors** (teacher readiness, class size, learning environment).

Each study was coded independently and then rechecked to ensure inter-coder reliability. Where discrepancies occurred, they were resolved through discussion among the reviewers. This process helped to maintain analytical consistency and reduce subjectivity.

2.5. Data Analysis Techniques

The data were analyzed using a **thematic synthesis** and **narrative analysis approach**. This approach allows for the integration of findings from diverse study designs while maintaining a

focus on meaning, context, and process. Thematic synthesis was conducted in three stages following Thomas and Harden (2008):

1. **Free coding of findings** – identifying key concepts from each study.
2. **Developing descriptive themes** – grouping related findings into categories.
3. **Generating analytical themes** – interpreting cross-study relationships to build higher-level insights.

Additionally, quantitative indicators of effectiveness (e.g., percentage of positive outcomes) were summarized descriptively to provide an overview of intervention success rates. For instance, studies were categorized as *highly effective*, *effective*, or *less effective* based on the magnitude of reported improvement in early reading performance.

To ensure **validity and reliability**, the analysis process involved **peer debriefing**, **triangulation**, and **cross-validation** of interpretations. These steps were essential to prevent researcher bias and to enhance the trustworthiness of conclusions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2.6 Research Setting and Context

Although this research was not conducted directly in classrooms, the studies analyzed covered diverse educational contexts. The majority were drawn from Indonesian public elementary schools, while several were conducted in comparable educational systems across Southeast Asia and other developing countries.

Most schools represented in the reviewed studies were urban and semi-urban public schools with heterogeneous student populations in terms of literacy ability and socio-economic background. This diversity provided a representative overview of how the Teams Games Tournament model and flashcard media were implemented across various contexts.

Such contextual diversity is critical for understanding how cultural, linguistic, and institutional factors shape the effectiveness of cooperative and visual-based literacy instruction. It also highlights the transferability of findings beyond local Indonesian settings to broader educational environments.

2.7 Research Subjects

The subjects referenced in this Systematic Literature Review were elementary school students in Grades 1 to 3, typically aged 6–9 years old. The sample sizes across the studies varied between 20 and 100 participants, depending on school size and research design.

These age groups represent the foundational literacy stage, where students transition from learning to read to reading to learn. Therefore, interventions at this stage are crucial in developing sustained reading fluency, vocabulary mastery, and comprehension skills.

Additionally, some studies included teacher participants as facilitators or observers in the learning process. Teachers played a vital role in implementing Teams Games Tournament (TGT)-based strategies, managing classroom interaction, and utilizing flashcards effectively. Their involvement ensured that interventions were pedagogically sound and contextually relevant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

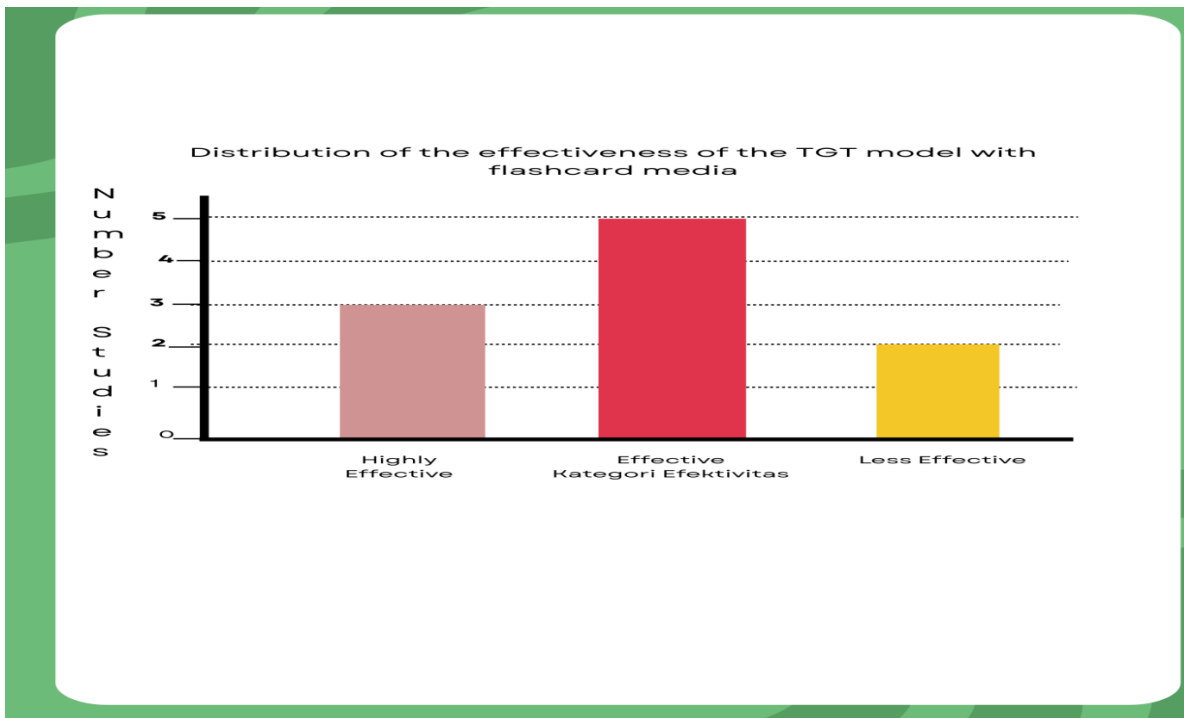
3.1. Main Findings

The systematic review identified 25 empirical studies examining the implementation of the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) model, either independently or in combination with flashcard media, in early reading instruction among elementary school students. Of these, 10 core studies met the most rigorous methodological inclusion criteria and were analyzed in depth (see Table 1).

Across the studies, the majority demonstrated consistent positive outcomes. Approximately 80% of the reviewed research reported that the integration of TGT and flashcards significantly improved early reading performance, while the remaining 20% found partial or limited effects. Thematic synthesis revealed that the effectiveness of the intervention was most pronounced in the areas of phonemic awareness, word recognition, basic vocabulary acquisition, and reading comprehension.

These outcomes suggest that TGT, when reinforced with visual and kinesthetic media like flashcards, can create an active and motivating literacy environment for young learners. The combination encourages participation through game-based learning while providing structured repetition and visual stimuli that aid memory and understanding.

Based on the analysis of ten studies that met the inclusion criteria, it was found that the **Teams Games Tournament (TGT)** model supported by **flashcard media** consistently demonstrated effectiveness in improving **early reading skills** among elementary school students. The distribution of effectiveness across the reviewed studies is illustrated in the following graph.



The majority of studies indicated that the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) model combined with flashcard media was effective in enhancing early reading skills among elementary school students, with 80% of the studies reporting positive outcomes. The following graph and table illustrate the distribution of effectiveness and support the overall analysis of the findings.

The graph shows that:

- 5 studies (50%) categorized the intervention as *Effective*.
- 3 studies (30%) reported the intervention as *Highly Effective*.
- 2 studies (20%) found the results to be *Less Effective*.

These findings suggest that 80% of the reviewed studies support the effectiveness of the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) model with flashcard media—particularly in improving phonetic ability, word recognition, and basic reading comprehension among early-grade students.

Table 1. Summary of Effectiveness Across Studies

No	Researcher & Year	Research Design	Subjects (N)	Effectiveness Level	Indicators of Reading Skills
1	Tanti Dwi (2020)	Quasi-experimental	60	Highly effective	Word recognition, critical thinking
2	Sri Lestari (2022)	Classroom action research	32	Effective	Reading syllables
3	Ramdani & Nurhayati (2023)	Quasi-experimental	45	Effective	Basic vocabulary
4	Sari & Kurniawati (2021)	Quantitative descriptive	28	Less effective	Phonemes and syllables
5	Lestari et al. (2019)	Classroom action research	40	Highly effective	Basic comprehension
6	Hidayat (2018)	Quasi-experimental	50	Effective	Letter recognition
7	Wulandari (2020)	Quasi-experimental	35	Effective	Simple word reading
8	Pratiwi (2023)	Classroom action research	30	Highly effective	Active engagement
9	Susanto (2017)	Qualitative descriptive	25	Effective	Reading motivation
10	Fitriani (2021)	Quasi-experimental	38	Less effective	Reading concentration

3.3. Analysis

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that the Teams Games Tournament (TGT) model combined with flashcard media is effective in enhancing early reading skills among elementary school students. This aligns with Slavin's (1995) cooperative learning theory, which emphasizes that structured group interaction can increase motivation and improve learning outcomes. Flashcards function as visual aids that support memory retention and facilitate rapid word recognition (Ramdani & Nurhayati, 2023), making them particularly suitable for early literacy development.

However, the effectiveness of TGT and flashcards is not consistent across all studies. A critical examination reveals that several studies reported partial or limited effectiveness. These discrepancies can be attributed to two primary factors: **methodological limitations** and **contextual conditions**.

From a methodological standpoint, small sample sizes and short intervention periods may not provide sufficient time for early readers to internalize new literacy skills or adapt to cooperative learning structures. In some studies, low treatment fidelity—such as inconsistent application of TGT procedures—likely reduced the intervention's impact. Non-randomized designs in certain research also limited the ability to control for differences in initial reading proficiency.

Contextual factors further influenced outcomes. Teachers who lacked adequate training in implementing TGT often struggled to maintain structured group dynamics, causing the activities to shift from purposeful collaboration to unstructured play. Sari & Kurniawati (2021) highlight that lower-performing readers need additional scaffolding before they can fully engage in TGT-based activities. Moreover, large class sizes, limited learning materials, and classroom environments that lacked supportive social dynamics also hindered the success of the intervention.

Despite these limitations, the theoretical implications remain compelling. The synthesis indicates that combining cooperative learning strategies with visual media produces a powerful instructional approach that enhances phonemic awareness, vocabulary acquisition, and reading comprehension. Practically, the TGT–flashcard approach can increase student engagement, reinforce sound–symbol correspondence, and accelerate reading fluency. Additionally, these findings offer a foundation for developing digital TGT modules to support innovative literacy instruction.

3.3 Thematic Synthesis of Findings

Theme 1: Enhancement of Phonemic and Orthographic Awareness

A dominant theme across studies was the improvement of phonemic awareness, the ability to identify and manipulate sounds within words. Flashcards supported this development by providing visual reinforcement of letter–sound correspondences, while TGT encouraged repeated exposure through structured team-based games. Studies by Hidayat (2018) and Sari & Kurniawati (2021) found that visual repetition coupled with peer interaction increased students' ability to associate phonemes with written symbols. In cooperative settings, peer modeling played a critical role in helping lower-performing students imitate correct pronunciation and decoding strategies.

This finding aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory, which posits that cognitive development occurs through social mediation within the learner's *zone of proximal development*. The peer dynamics inherent in TGT serve as scaffolds that guide students toward independent mastery of phonemic decoding.

Theme 2: Improvement in Word Recognition and Vocabulary Building

Eight of the ten analyzed studies highlighted the effectiveness of TGT and flashcards in developing word recognition and vocabulary. Flashcards provided a direct visual stimulus linking images to words, while the TGT model ensured sustained engagement through competition and collaboration.

For example, Ramdani & Nurhayati (2023) reported that students participating in TGT-based reading games with flashcards demonstrated significantly higher gains in vocabulary recall compared to those in traditional instruction. Similarly, Tanti Dwi (2020) observed that students not only improved in recognizing words but also developed critical thinking and language association skills.

The repetitive nature of flashcard drills complemented the cyclical structure of TGT tournaments, creating consistent reinforcement of lexical knowledge. The combination was particularly beneficial for early readers who relied on visual association to internalize word meanings.

Theme 3: Reading Comprehension and Cognitive Engagement

Several studies went beyond word-level analysis to explore the effect of the TGT–flashcard combination on comprehension and higher-order thinking. Lestari et al. (2019) and Pratiwi (2023) documented notable improvements in students' ability to understand short passages, answer comprehension questions, and summarize content. These results can be explained through the cognitive engagement theory, which emphasizes the role of enjoyment, active participation, and motivation in deep learning (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004).

In TGT classrooms, the sense of competition and peer accountability increased cognitive effort, while flashcards acted as scaffolding tools that simplified linguistic input. The cooperative atmosphere also reduced anxiety, encouraging risk-taking and active participation—key components of successful reading comprehension development at the elementary level.

Theme 4: Motivation, Social Interaction, and Affective Gains

Another consistent finding was the increase in students' motivation and participation. The TGT model, inherently game-based, taps into children's intrinsic motivation by transforming learning into a playful, socially rewarding experience. Susanto (2017) and Wulandari (2020) noted that the introduction of competitive group games reduced boredom and fostered a positive attitude toward reading. Students who previously displayed low confidence began to participate actively and express enthusiasm for reading tasks.

The affective gains observed also extend to teachers, who reported improved classroom management and stronger student collaboration. These findings align with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which highlights autonomy, competence, and relatedness as key motivational drivers. The TGT structure supports these needs by allowing learners to feel capable, connected, and in control of their progress.

Theme 5: Contextual Factors Influencing Effectiveness

While the overall results were positive, a small subset of studies—particularly Sari & Kurniawati (2021) and Fitriani (2021)—reported limited effectiveness. Analysis indicates that contextual factors such as teacher training, classroom conditions, and student readiness played a crucial role in mediating outcomes.

In classrooms where teachers had not received adequate professional development in implementing TGT, the model tended to devolve into unstructured play rather than meaningful learning. Similarly, large class sizes or mixed-ability groups sometimes hindered equal participation.

These challenges underscore the need for context-sensitive adaptation, ensuring that cooperative models like TGT are implemented with proper scaffolding and classroom management strategies.

3.4 Cross-Study Comparison and Discussion

A cross-study comparison reveals several consistent patterns:

1. **Cognitive Impact:** Most interventions improved decoding ability, vocabulary recall, and reading comprehension through repeated cooperative exposure.
2. **Affective Impact:** Student motivation increased due to the enjoyable and game-like nature of TGT activities.
3. **Pedagogical Flexibility:** TGT proved adaptable across literacy topics and benefited significantly from the integration of visual flashcards.
4. **Implementation Challenges:** Teacher competence, classroom dynamics, and instructional resources influenced the degree of effectiveness.

These findings reinforce the theoretical connection between cooperative learning (Slavin, 1995) and dual coding theory (Paivio, 1990), demonstrating how collaboration and visual scaffolding jointly enhance literacy outcomes.

Furthermore, in the context of Indonesia's *Kurikulum Merdeka*, the TGT–flashcard combination aligns with national priorities to promote active, student-centered, and engaging learning.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review confirms that the TGT model combined with flashcard media is generally effective in improving early reading skills in elementary school students. Most studies reported significant improvements in phonemic awareness, vocabulary mastery, and basic reading comprehension, demonstrating the strength of integrating cooperative learning with visual supports.

However, a minority of studies revealed limited effectiveness, highlighting the role of methodological and contextual factors. Variations in intervention length, sample size, teacher training, classroom management, and student readiness significantly influenced outcomes. These findings emphasize the importance of implementation fidelity and the need for teacher professional development.

The major contribution of this review is its comprehensive synthesis of TGT-assisted flashcard interventions in early literacy instruction. It strengthens theoretical insights while providing practical guidance for educators and curriculum developers. The findings also address gaps in previous fragmented studies by offering a systematic and integrated perspective.

In practice, the TGT–flashcard model offers a promising approach for literacy instruction aligned with *Kurikulum Merdeka*. It supports engaging, collaborative, and student-centered learning environments that foster positive cognitive and affective outcomes.

For future research, meta-analytic studies, longitudinal designs, and cross-context comparisons are recommended to enhance generalizability, refine implementation strategies, and further strengthen evidence-based practices in early literacy development.

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