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Literature Study on Bilingual Education in Enhancing English Literacy of Elementary School Students

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of bilingual education in improving English literacy among elementary school students, particularly in early reading and writing skills. The method used was a PRISMA-based Systematic Literature Review (SLR), analyzing 20 selected articles from approximately 50 studies published between 2020 and 2025. Articles were selected based on inclusion criteria, namely studies at the elementary school level, focusing on English literacy, and originating from peer-reviewed journals. Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis to identify key patterns such as vocabulary development, reading comprehension, metalinguistic awareness, as well as translanguaging and scaffolding strategies. The results of the study indicate that bilingual learning significantly enhances vocabulary, text comprehension, and metalinguistic awareness through language transfer from the first language to the second language. The use of the first language as a scaffold helps students grasp concepts gradually, while visual media and interactive activities enhance learning engagement. The novelty of this study lies in its systematic synthesis, which specifically highlights literacy and formulates a conceptual framework for the relationship between translanguaging, scaffolding, and literacy development. The implications of this study are the need for structured bilingual education, the strategic use of the first language, and the integration of interactive media and a phased approach toward the full use of English in the classroom.
Keywords: bilingual education, English literacy, elementary school, translanguaging, scaffolding

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis efektivitas pembelajaran bilingual dalam meningkatkan literasi Bahasa Inggris siswa sekolah dasar, khususnya kemampuan membaca dan menulis permulaan. Metode yang digunakan adalah *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) berbasis PRISMA dengan menganalisis 20 artikel terpilih dari sekitar 50 studi yang dipublikasikan pada tahun 2020–2025. Artikel dipilih berdasarkan kriteria inklusi, yaitu penelitian pada jenjang sekolah dasar, berfokus pada literasi Bahasa Inggris, dan berasal dari jurnal *peer-reviewed*. Analisis data dilakukan melalui analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola utama seperti perkembangan kosakata, pemahaman membaca, kesadaran metalinguistik, serta strategi translanguaging dan *scaffolding*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran bilingual secara signifikan meningkatkan kosakata, pemahaman teks, dan kesadaran metalinguistik melalui transfer bahasa dari bahasa pertama ke bahasa kedua. Penggunaan bahasa pertama sebagai penopang membantu siswa memahami konsep secara bertahap, sementara media visual dan aktivitas interaktif meningkatkan keterlibatan belajar. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada sintesis sistematis yang secara khusus menyoroti literasi serta merumuskan kerangka konseptual hubungan antara translanguaging, *scaffolding*, dan perkembangan literasi. Implikasi penelitian ini adalah perlunya penerapan pembelajaran bilingual yang terstruktur, penggunaan bahasa pertama secara strategis, serta integrasi media interaktif dan strategi bertahap menuju penggunaan penuh Bahasa Inggris di kelas.
Kata Kunci: pembelajaran bilingual, literasi Bahasa Inggris, sekolah dasar, translanguaging, scaffolding.

Introduction

The rapid advancement of globalization and information technology has increased the demand for English proficiency among younger generations. At the elementary school level, English literacy, particularly basic reading and writing skills, plays a crucial role in enabling students to communicate in international contexts and access global knowledge. (Bialystok, 2018) emphasizes that early language exposure significantly contributes to children's cognitive development and literacy acquisition. Therefore, strengthening English literacy at the primary level has become an essential educational priority.

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However, the development of English literacy among elementary school students remains problematic. Many students experience difficulties in understanding simple texts, acquiring vocabulary, and producing basic written expressions. Studies by (Saputri & Ritonga, 2024) reveal that limited exposure to English in classroom interactions contributes to low literacy achievement. Similarly, (Aprilia et al., 2023) found that insufficient practice leads to slow development of reading and writing skills. In addition, previous studies indicate that ineffective and monotonous teaching methods, along with limited instructional media and low student motivation, can reduce students' engagement and significantly hinder literacy development, suggesting that teaching practices remain a critical issue in elementary education (Apriyani & Elizar, 2024; Primayana & Dewi, 2025).

However, these studies mainly describe existing problems without offering integrated pedagogical solutions. As a result, they provide limited insight into effective approaches that can systematically improve English literacy among elementary school students.

One approach that has gained attention is bilingual learning. This approach integrates students' first language, namely Indonesian, and English, allowing learners to understand content more gradually and meaningfully. Research by (Oshchepkova et al., 2023) indicates that bilingual learning can increase language exposure, enrich vocabulary acquisition, and support the development of reading and writing skills. In addition, the use of the first language helps reduce students' anxiety and enhances their confidence in using English.

Nevertheless, previous studies on bilingual learning show inconsistent findings and limited focus. Some studies report improvements in general language proficiency but do not specifically examine literacy skills such as reading and writing as core competencies. Other studies emphasize cognitive development or overall academic achievement without directly linking these outcomes to English literacy. Furthermore, research by (Castro et al., 2025) highlights broader educational impacts of bilingual learning but does not provide an in depth analysis of its effectiveness in improving foundational literacy skills.

These conditions indicate that previous research remains fragmented and lacks a clear focus on English literacy development. In addition, most studies have not been systematically synthesized, making it difficult to draw comprehensive and reliable conclusions regarding the effectiveness of bilingual learning.

Therefore, a significant research gap can be identified. There is still a lack of studies that systematically synthesize and critically evaluate existing research on bilingual education using a structured approach such as a systematic literature review. Without such synthesis, understanding of bilingual learning effectiveness remains partial and inconclusive.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of bilingual education in enhancing English literacy among elementary school students through a systematic literature review.

Method

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method in accordance with the international PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure that the literature search and selection process was conducted systematically, transparently, and in a structured manner. From the outset of the study, it was determined that 20 scientific articles would be analyzed as the primary sources. These articles were obtained from accredited national journals and reputable international journals published between 2020 and 2025 to ensure the relevance and recency of the data.

The literature search was conducted using several databases, such as Google Scholar and Scopus, with the keywords "bilingual learning," "translanguaging," "CLIL," "English literacy," and "elementary school students." Following the PRISMA guidelines, article selection was carried out in four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. During the identification stage, approximately 50 articles were found; subsequently, a screening process based on titles and abstracts was conducted to eliminate irrelevant articles. Next, during the eligibility stage, a full-text review was performed, ultimately yielding 20 articles that met the criteria and were analyzed in this study.

Articles were selected using clear inclusion and exclusion criteria. Inclusion criteria include: (1) research focusing on bilingual or two-language learning at the elementary school level, (2) studies addressing English literacy such as reading, writing, vocabulary, or text comprehension, (3) articles published in reputable scientific journals, and (4) published between 2020 and 2025. The exclusion criteria include: (1) research not relevant to the elementary school context, (2) articles that do not specifically address aspects of literacy, (3) non-scientific publications or those not subject to peer review, and (4) articles that are not available in full.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic analysis approach, which involves the processes of coding, grouping, and interpreting data to identify the main themes that recur. These themes include vocabulary development, reading comprehension, metalinguistic awareness, translanguaging strategies, the use of the first language (L1) as scaffolding, the effectiveness of the CLIL approach, and various challenges in implementing bilingual education. The results of the analysis were then synthesized to identify patterns of relationships among the research findings.

Table 1. Article Summary

Author (Year)	Focus	Findings
(García & Wei, 2018)	Translanguaging	Improves comprehension
(Puspitasari et al., 2021)	Bilingual literacy	Expands vocabulary

Author (Year)	Focus	Findings
(Sari et al., 2024)	CLIL	Improves literacy
(Castro et al., 2025)	Dual language	Improves learning outcomes
...	...	...

To ensure validity and reliability, this study employed source triangulation, which involves comparing findings from various articles on the same topic. Additionally, the analysis process was conducted consistently through the stages of coding and thematic categorization to minimize researcher subjectivity. The use of sources from reputable scientific journals that have undergone a peer-review process also strengthens the reliability and credibility of the research results. Thus, the results of this study are academically accountable and provide a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of bilingual learning in improving English literacy among elementary school students.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

This section synthesizes empirical evidence from recent studies to examine the impact of bilingual instruction on English literacy development among elementary school learners. Bilingual education, defined as the systematic integration of a first language (L1) and a second language (L2) within classroom instruction, is increasingly recognized as an effective pedagogical approach that enhances students' reading, writing, and comprehension skills compared to monolingual or English-only instruction (García & Wei, 2018; Salmerón, 2022).

Recent research indicates that well-designed bilingual programs contribute significantly to vocabulary growth and reading comprehension, as learners are consistently exposed to meaningful and comprehensible English input through both languages. This exposure facilitates the transfer of literacy skills from L1 to L2, enabling students to construct deeper understanding of texts and improve overall literacy performance (Puspitasari et al., 2021; Salmerón, 2022).

In addition to lexical growth, bilingual instruction fosters metalinguistic awareness, which refers to learners' ability to consciously reflect on language structures. Enhanced metalinguistic awareness has been linked to improved reading comprehension and language analysis skills in bilingual settings, where students regularly compare and contrast L1 and L2 structures.

Similarly, studies on bilingual classroom strategies report that integrating translanguaging practices in which teachers fluidly use both languages during instruction supports learners' literacy development. Such pedagogical approaches help students build conceptual understanding in L1 before transferring that knowledge to L2 context, thus reducing affective barriers and increasing learner confidence.

Moreover, qualitative research on English literacy activities in bilingual primary schools demonstrates specific instructional practices such as guided reading, multimedia-assisted reading, and thinking aloud strategies which contribute to sustained literacy engagement among young learners. These practices create diverse opportunities for students to interact with English texts in meaningful ways, enhancing both comprehension and motivation.

However, while the overall trend favors bilingual instruction, evidence also highlights implementation challenges such as limited teacher training, insufficient instructional resources, and variability in program quality. Addressing these challenges is critical to ensure that bilingual programs yield consistent and equitable literacy outcomes for all students.

Collectively, the synthesized findings illustrate that bilingual learning when supported by thoughtful pedagogy, translanguaging strategies, and engaging literacy activities can significantly improve multiple dimensions of English literacy in elementary learners, including vocabulary, reading comprehension, and critical language awareness.

Table 2. Synthesis Table of Bilingual Learning Findings in Elementary Schools

Finding Category	Description of Findings	Sources
Vocabulary and Text Comprehension Growth	Regular exposure to English through bilingual programs significantly enhances students' vocabulary and reading comprehension. Translanguaging practices allow learners to connect concepts from their first language (L1) to English (L2), facilitating understanding of instructions and basic texts.	(García & Wei, 2018)
Metalinguistic Awareness	Bilingual students demonstrate higher awareness of language structures, sentence patterns, and word relationships, which supports more effective reading comprehension and	(Fernandez-Dalona & Dalona, 2019; Papastefanou et al., 2021)

Finding Category	Description of Findings	Sources
	text analysis.	
Academic Literacy Development via CLIL	Implementation of CLIL improves writing skills, language use, and listening comprehension, particularly in subjects like Science and Mathematics. Detailed reading skills, however, still require further reinforcement.	(Sari et al., 2024)
Teacher Translanguaging Strategies	Strategic use of L1 as a scaffold before introducing L2 boosts student participation, reduces anxiety, and encourages attempts at reading and writing in English.	(Liando et al., 2022; Nursanti, 2021; Sutrisno, 2023; Wulandari et al., 2023)
Media and Interactive Activities	The use of visual media, short videos, vocabulary cards, and interactive activities such as storytelling, language games, and role-play strengthens dual-language comprehension and increases student motivation.	(Kishchak et al., 2024)
Implementation Challenges	Differences in students' initial proficiency, limited instructional time, and lack of bilingual resources are key obstacles. Differentiated instructional strategies and interactive media are necessary to address these challenges.	(Achmad et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2025)

The table below presents a synthesis of key findings from recent research on bilingual education in elementary schools. It summarizes the main benefits, strategies, and challenges associated with bilingual instruction, highlighting its impact on vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, metalinguistic awareness, academic literacy, and student engagement. This overview serves as a foundation for a detailed discussion of each category.

1. Vocabulary and Text Comprehension

   The reviewed literature consistently shows that bilingual programs significantly aid students in expanding their English vocabulary and in understanding written texts. When learning activities deliberately combine Indonesian (L1) with English (L2), learners are better able to make meaningful connections between familiar concepts and new English words, which supports both vocabulary retention and comprehension (Puspitasari et al., 2021). Structured classroom routines such as guided reading, use of multimedia during reading sessions, and interactive reading-based tasks enhance learners' ability to understand meaning beyond simple word recognition.

   In addition, a systematic review of dual language educational models found that learners participating in structured bilingual instruction often display stronger reading comprehension outcomes compared to learners in monolingual programs. This result supports the idea that continuous and contextual exposure to English, aligned with a learner's primary language, strengthens comprehension skills more effectively than exposure to English alone (Gersalia & Estremera, 2025).

2. Metalinguistic Awareness

   Another consistent finding from the literature is that bilingual education enhances students' *metalinguistic awareness* the ability to think about and analyze language as a system. Within bilingual classrooms, learners frequently engage in comparing linguistic elements between L1 and L2. This mental engagement helps students recognize patterns, structures, and language features that might otherwise remain unnoticed(Gersalia & Estremera, 2025). As a result, learners become more adept at understanding how text meaning is constructed in both languages, which contributes to deeper reading comprehension and overall language competence.

   This cognitive benefit is especially important because it enables learners to transfer literacy skills from Indonesian into English more effectively. The ability to reflect on language features allows students to break down complex texts and build stronger interpretive strategies, supporting long-term literacy growth.

3. Academic Literacy Through Integrated Instruction Models

   Research also highlights the value of instructional models that simultaneously teach academic content and language use. These models, which may include CLIL-inspired approaches or bilingual subject-integration methods, provide learners with opportunities to interact with English vocabulary and structures within meaningful subject matter contexts (e.g., science or math tasks). Such embedded language exposure creates richer opportunities for learners to practice English in realistic, content-driven situations, leading to improvements not only in language skills but also in academic understanding (Gersalia & Estremera, 2025).

The strength of this approach lies in its dual focus: students learn subject content while also enhancing literacy. Because the language demands are connected directly to meaningful tasks, learners develop skills that are transferable to real academic reading and writing.

4. Teacher Translanguaging Strategies and Interactive Media

   Scholarship on bilingual pedagogy emphasizes the importance of translanguaging, where teachers purposefully alternate between Indonesian and English to support student understanding. Rather than strictly separating the use of languages, educators use students' first language strategically to scaffold thinking and reduce frustration, enabling learners to engage more confidently with English literacy tasks (Salmerón, 2022). This approach supports students' cognitive access to complex content, especially during early stages of language learning.

   In addition, the integration of visual and multimedia resources such as illustrated texts, video prompts, and interactive digital materials has been shown to enhance learners' engagement and comprehension. These tools help bridge the gap between word recognition and meaningful interpretation, making reading activities more accessible and motivating for young bilingual learners.

5. Challenges in Implementation

   Although the advantages of bilingual instruction are well supported in the literature, research also identifies several obstacles that affect effective implementation. Teacher preparation, instructional resource availability, and differences in students' initial language skills are common challenges. For example, some studies find that when resources are limited or when teacher training is inconsistent, the expected literacy gains from bilingual programs may not materialize fully (Palacios et al., 2024). This suggests that implementation quality plays a crucial role in achieving the potential benefits of bilingual instruction.

   Additionally, learners with low initial exposure to English may require differentiated strategies tailored to their proficiency levels. Without planned instructional support, these learners may struggle to benefit from bilingual instruction as fully as their peers.

In summary, the synthesized findings indicate that bilingual instruction offers substantial advantages in fostering English literacy among elementary school students. Exposure to both L1 and L2 not only accelerates vocabulary acquisition and enhances reading comprehension but also strengthens metalinguistic awareness and academic literacy skills. Furthermore, bilingual approaches promote greater student confidence and active participation in classroom activities compared to non-bilingual settings. Despite these benefits, challenges such as disparities in students' initial proficiency levels and limited access to suitable bilingual learning resources remain. The literature highlights that these obstacles can be effectively addressed through targeted teaching strategies, teacher-guided translanguaging, and the integration of interactive multimedia tools. Collectively, these insights underscore that well-structured bilingual programs create a more supportive and dynamic learning environment, offering learners more consistent and meaningful literacy development than instruction conducted solely in English.

Discussion

This study demonstrates that bilingual instruction significantly contributes to the development of English literacy among elementary school students, particularly in vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, metalinguistic awareness, and learning engagement. However, these findings should not be interpreted merely as the result of using two languages in instruction; rather, they reflect a complex interaction among cognitive processes, the quality of linguistic input, and pedagogical strategies implemented in the classroom. Therefore, this discussion connects the findings with theories of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), bilingualism, and scaffolding to provide a deeper explanation of the underlying mechanisms (Castro et al., 2025).

From an SLA perspective, the improvement in vocabulary and reading comprehension identified in this study is closely associated with the concept of comprehensible input. The use of Indonesian (L1) in instruction allows students to access meaning before engaging with English (L2) texts, thereby reducing the cognitive load typically experienced by beginner learners. This process enhances not only the quantity but also the quality of language exposure, as students receive input that is more accessible and relevant to their experiences. (Castro et al., 2025) emphasize that effective bilingual programs must provide structured and meaningful input to significantly improve literacy outcomes. However, the findings of this study indicate that such effectiveness is not automatic. Input becomes meaningful only when supported by structured pedagogical interaction, such as guided reading and the use of contextualized instructional media. This suggests that the success of bilingual instruction depends more on how language is used in the teaching process than on the mere presence of two languages. These findings challenge previous literature that tends to oversimplify the relationship between bilingual exposure and literacy development without adequately considering the role of classroom interaction (Palacios et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the findings reveal the presence of cross-linguistic transfer from L1 to L2, which aligns with bilingualism theory, particularly the concept of common underlying proficiency. Students draw upon their existing knowledge of Indonesian to comprehend English texts, especially in recognizing text structures and meaning relationships. This process accelerates comprehension, as learners construct meaning based on prior linguistic experience rather than starting from zero. (Gersalia & Estremera, 2025) report that students in bilingual programs demonstrate stronger reading comprehension due to

the transfer of literacy skills across languages. However, a deeper analysis indicates that this transfer is not always beneficial. In some cases, students experience interference due to structural differences between Indonesian and English, such as literal translation and incorrect sentence construction. This finding highlights the dynamic nature of language transfer and underscores the need for appropriate pedagogical intervention. Teachers, therefore, play a crucial role not only as facilitators of bilingual language use but also as mediators who guide students in understanding similarities and differences between languages in a reflective manner. This is particularly important because much of the existing literature emphasizes positive transfer while overlooking potential challenges in real classroom contexts (Nurmaya & Husna, 2025).

In terms of scaffolding, this study finds that translanguaging strategies used by teachers play a critical role in supporting students' comprehension. The use of L1 as a supportive tool enables learners to access complex concepts before expressing them in English. (Salmerón, 2022) highlights that translanguaging enhances literacy development by allowing students to formulate ideas in a more familiar language before transferring them into the target language. However, the effectiveness of this strategy does not lie in the use of L1 itself, but in how the support is gradually provided and reduced. In practice, effective scaffolding involves a progression from teacher modeling, to guided practice, and ultimately to independent language use. When this process is not implemented gradually, students tend to remain dependent on L1 and struggle to develop autonomy in English. Therefore, translanguaging should be designed as a temporary and adaptive instructional strategy rather than a permanent solution. This finding reinforces the perspective that scaffolding is a structured pedagogical process that must involve the gradual withdrawal of support (Palacios et al., 2024).

In addition, the increase in metalinguistic awareness observed in this study indicates that bilingual instruction also contributes to students' cognitive development. Students become more sensitive to language structures, are able to compare sentence patterns, and develop an understanding of relationships between words across two linguistic systems. This finding is consistent with international research suggesting that bilingualism enhances analytical language skills and cognitive flexibility (Castro et al., 2025). However, this awareness does not emerge automatically from exposure to two languages; rather, it develops through classroom interactions that encourage reflection on language. When teachers explicitly highlight differences between L1 and L2, students are better able to understand how meaning is constructed in each language. This underscores the critical role of teacher mediation in fostering metalinguistic awareness. At the same time, it challenges assumptions in some literature that bilingualism inherently leads to increased language awareness without considering the importance of pedagogical support (Gersalia & Estremera, 2025).

The use of instructional media in this study also demonstrates a more complex role than merely enhancing student motivation. Media such as images, videos, and interactive activities function as cognitive mediators that help students connect visual representations with linguistic meaning. (Kishchak et al., 2024) argue that visual media enhance comprehension through the integration of verbal and visual information. As a result, students do not simply memorize vocabulary but develop a deeper understanding of its contextual use. However, the effectiveness of media depends largely on how it is integrated into the instructional process. Without clear pedagogical direction, media may function only as passive stimuli with limited impact on literacy development. This finding critiques the prevailing tendency in educational practice to overemphasize the use of technology without sufficient attention to instructional design.

Despite the benefits of bilingual instruction, this study also identifies several challenges in its implementation. Variations in students' initial English proficiency create diverse learning needs, requiring teachers to adopt differentiated instructional strategies. Additionally, limited teacher training in bilingual pedagogy remains a major obstacle to effective implementation. Many teachers lack a deep understanding of how to strategically manage the use of two languages in the classroom. Furthermore, the scarcity of contextually relevant bilingual instructional materials poses additional challenges. These findings are consistent with (Zhang et al., 2025), who emphasize that implementation quality is a key factor in the success of bilingual programs. Therefore, the implementation of bilingual education should be supported by continuous teacher training, context-sensitive curriculum development, and adequate resource provision.

In conclusion, this study confirms that bilingual instruction is an effective approach for enhancing English literacy among elementary school students; however, its effectiveness is not automatic. It depends on the balance between L1 and L2 use, the quality of pedagogical interaction, and the teacher's ability to implement scaffolding and translanguaging strategies appropriately. Thus, bilingual instruction should not be viewed merely as the use of two languages in the classroom, but as a complex pedagogical approach that requires careful planning, implementation, and evaluation (Palacios et al., 2024).

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that bilingual instruction is effective in enhancing English literacy among elementary school students, particularly in reading and writing skills. The integration of Indonesian and English enables students to receive gradual language exposure, facilitating comprehension while supporting the development of English proficiency in a more meaningful and less stressful learning environment.

This study contributes to the existing literature by providing a systematic synthesis of previous research on bilingual education and its role in improving English literacy. It highlights that bilingual instruction not only supports language development but also strengthens students' engagement and confidence. In addition, this study addresses the limitation of

previous research by focusing specifically on literacy skills and integrating findings through a systematic literature review approach.

In terms of practical implications, teachers are encouraged to implement structured bilingual strategies such as the use of the first language as scaffolding, contextual learning activities, and interactive media to support literacy development. Schools should also provide teacher training and adequate learning resources to ensure effective implementation. Furthermore, future research is recommended to examine the long term impact of bilingual instruction and explore its application in diverse educational contexts.

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