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Canva-Based Learning Media and Elementary Students' Reading Outcomes: A Critical Literature Review of Evidence, Methodological Gaps, and Pedagogical Implications

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ABSTRACT

Canva-based learning media have increasingly been used in elementary education to support reading instruction through visually rich and interactive materials. However, reported outcomes span several dimensions of reading and are supported by heterogeneous research designs, making the strength of the evidence difficult to determine. This study critically synthesizes empirical evidence on Canva-based learning media and multidimensional reading outcomes among elementary students and identifies methodological gaps and pedagogical implications. A Critical Literature Review (CLR) was conducted using PRISMA 2020 as a reporting guide for study identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. The review covered peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2026. Following full-text screening, 15 studies were included in the qualitative synthesis. Study quality was appraised using four qualitative criteria covering methodological rigor, reporting clarity, relevance to the review questions and elementary reading context, and contribution to Canva-supported literacy instruction. Nine of the 15 studies employed research-and-development (R&D) designs, while only three studies used experimental or quasi-experimental comparative approaches. Positive outcomes were reported across beginning reading, reading comprehension, reading literacy, reading interest, motivation, and engagement. Nevertheless, the evidence is stronger for feasibility, validity, practicality, usability, and preliminary effectiveness than for an independently established causal effect of Canva. The findings suggest that Canva is best interpreted as a flexible pedagogical technology whose contribution depends on multimedia design, cognitive processing, motivation, engagement, instructional strategy, and teacher TPACK. Future research should prioritize

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stronger comparative designs, longitudinal follow-up, larger and multi-school samples, and studies that can distinguish Canva-centered effects from effects of accompanying pedagogical models.
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Reading is a foundational competence in elementary education because it supports students' access to knowledge, participation in classroom learning, and development of broader literacy competencies. At the elementary level, reading development is multidimensional, encompassing beginning reading and word recognition, reading comprehension, reading literacy, reading interest, motivation, and engagement with texts. This multidimensional character is important when interpreting digital-media research because a reported improvement in one outcome, such as reading interest, should not automatically be treated as evidence of improvement in another, such as comprehension.

The development of digital technology has created opportunities for teachers to design learning environments that combine text, visual representations, audio, animation, and interactive activities. Previous reviews of interactive reading applications and digital learning media suggest that multimedia features may support emergent literacy, motivation, engagement, and comprehension. These broader findings establish the relevance of multimedia learning but do not by themselves establish what can be concluded specifically about Canva-based learning media.

Canva has become one of the digital platforms increasingly employed by teachers and educational researchers to develop instructional materials. Its templates and multimedia functions allow teachers to construct presentations, digital comics, interactive worksheets, flashcards, e-modules, educational games, Big Books, and other visually oriented resources. The included empirical studies show that Canva has been applied to beginning reading, reading comprehension, reading literacy, and reading-interest instruction (Aulia et al., 2023; Ginayah et al., 2024; Mbuik et al., 2025; Brilliananda et al., 2026). A Canva-specific review is therefore warranted because the platform is not merely a generic digital medium: its instructional use is frequently embedded in particular product-development procedures, learning models, and classroom contexts.

However, the evidence base is heterogeneous. Research designs range from qualitative case studies and research-and-development studies to experimental and quasi-experimental designs. Several interventions also combine Canva with pedagogical models such as SQ3R and RADEC. Consequently, the literature does not yet provide a uniform basis for determining which reading outcomes are most consistently reported, how strong the evidence is across outcomes, or how much of an observed outcome can be attributed specifically to Canva rather than to the accompanying pedagogy, content, instructional design, or teacher implementation. A conclusion that Canva itself universally improves reading outcomes would therefore overstate the available evidence.

1.2. Research Gap and Novelty

The updated evidence base indicates that research on Canva and elementary reading has expanded across beginning reading, reading comprehension, reading literacy, reading interest, motivation, and engagement. What remains insufficiently established is not simply whether positive findings exist, but how consistently those findings occur

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across outcome dimensions, what methodological strength supports them, what pedagogical mechanisms may explain them, and whether Canva has an identifiable contribution when it is combined with other instructional components.

This review contributes as a critical synthesis and conceptual integration rather than as a proposal of a new theory. First, it treats reading outcomes as a multidimensional construct. Second, it distinguishes development evidence from effectiveness and causal evidence. Third, it integrates multimedia design, cognitive processing, motivation, engagement, teacher TPACK, and reading outcomes into a proposed explanatory framework. The framework is conceptual and is not presented as an empirically validated causal model

1.3. Research Questions

RQ1. How is Canva-based learning media implemented in elementary reading instruction?
RQ2. What reading outcomes are reported in studies of Canva-based learning media among elementary students?
RQ3. What methodological patterns, strengths, limitations, and evidence gaps characterize existing research on Canva-supported elementary reading instruction?

2. METHODS

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a Critical Literature Review (CLR). CLR was selected because the purpose was not merely to aggregate findings but to critically examine research designs, instructional applications, outcomes, methodological strengths and limitations, and theoretical implications. In contrast to a conventional systematic review or meta-analysis, the present review does not calculate a pooled effect size and does not treat heterogeneous designs as directly combinable estimates. PRISMA 2020 was used as a reporting guide for transparent identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion procedures, while the synthesis remained critical and narrative (Page et al., 2021).

2.2. Search Strategy

The literature search covered publications from 2020 to 2026 and focused on the intersection of Canva, elementary/primary education, and reading or literacy outcomes. The retained search record documents 16 candidate journal articles assessed at full-text level. The conceptual search string was structured as: (Canva OR "Canva-based learning media" OR "Canva application") AND (elementary OR "primary school" OR "elementary education") AND (reading OR "reading comprehension" OR "beginning reading" OR "reading literacy" OR "reading interest" OR "reading motivation"). The search was supplemented by checking publisher pages and reference information for candidate studies. The archived search record does not preserve a complete database-by-database log, exact run dates, search interfaces, or line-by-line query strings for every source. Therefore, the search is reported transparently at the conceptual level, while database-specific reproducibility cannot be claimed retrospectively from the retained record.

2.3. Eligibility Criteria

Studies were included when they were peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2026, focused on elementary/primary education, investigated Canva as a learning medium or instructional technology, addressed at least one reading-related outcome, and provided sufficient methodological information for appraisal. Theses,

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dissertations, conference proceedings, duplicate records, studies outside elementary education, and studies without a relevant reading/literacy outcome were excluded.

2.4. Study Selection

The selection process followed the PRISMA 2020 sequence of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. The auditable retained record establishes 16 full-text reports assessed for eligibility; one report was excluded because it did not meet the required publication type, leaving 15 studies for qualitative synthesis. Counts for the earlier identification, screening, and duplicate-removal stages cannot be verified from the retained search archive. Figure 1 therefore reports only the auditable full-text stage and does not reconstruct earlier counts from inference. This approach avoids introducing unsupported PRISMA numbers while making the boundary of the available evidence explicit.

2.5. Data Extraction and Analysis

A standardized extraction matrix captured author, year, country, grade, sample, Canva media, learning model, research design, reading outcome, instrument, main findings, limitations, and quality appraisal. Where reported, the matrix also recorded intervention duration, comparator or control condition, effect estimates, and relevant Canva implementation characteristics. When these details were not reported in the reviewed record, they were not inferred. Because the studies differed substantially in design and outcome measures, the findings were synthesized narratively rather than pooled statistically.

2.6. Quality Appraisal

Each included study was appraised using four equally weighted qualitative criteria: methodological rigor; clarity of research design and reporting; relevance to the review questions and elementary reading context; and contribution to Canva-supported literacy knowledge. No numerical total score was calculated. Moderate-High indicated comparatively strong design, clear reporting, direct relevance, and meaningful contribution; Moderate indicated relevant evidence with notable methodological or contextual limitations; and Moderate-Low indicated substantial limitations for causal interpretation. These are descriptive synthesis labels, not validated risk-of-bias scores. No duplicate appraisal or inter-rater agreement was claimed because the retained review record did not document such a procedure.

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3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. PRISMA 2020 Study Selection

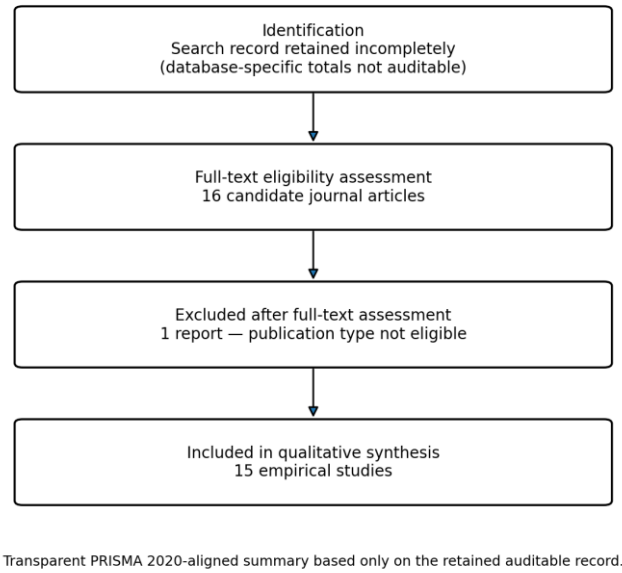


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020-aligned study-selection summary based on the auditable retained record. Because the archived search log does not preserve verifiable counts for earlier identification and duplicate-removal stages, the figure reports only the documented full-text eligibility and inclusion stages.

3.2. Characteristics of Included Studies

Fifteen studies met the eligibility criteria. All included studies were conducted in Indonesia and involved elementary students from Grades I to V. The studies were published from 2023 to 2026, although the search window was defined as 2020-2026. The archived screening record does not preserve a year-by-year exclusion log for 2020-2022; therefore, the absence of included studies from those years is reported descriptively rather than assigned to a specific exclusion reason.

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Table 1. Characteristics of included studies.

Author	Year	Country	Grade	Sample	Canva Media	Learning Model	Research Design	Reading Outcome	Instrument	Main Findings	Limitations	Quality
Aulia et al.	2023	Indonesia	Grade I	SD Negeri 31 Payakumbuh	Interactive multimedia	—	Experimental; post-test-only control group	Beginning reading	Reading test/post-test	Experimental group outperformed control group.	Single-school; short-term; post-test only.	Moderate–High
Vidiawati & Istikomah	2023	Indonesia	Primary	SDN Sumorame	Posters, videos, animations	—	Qualitative case study	Reading interest	Observation/interview/documentation	Canva supported interest in Qur'anic reading and writing.	Qualitative; contextual; no causal comparison.	Moderate
Ginayah et al.	2024	Indonesia	Grade II	Elementary school	Interactive multimedia	—	R&D; ADDIE	Beginning reading	Expert validation; student response; reading activities	High validity and positive student response.	Development-focused; limited causal evidence.	Moderate
Maghfiroh & Hendratno	2024	Indonesia	Grade I	Elementary school	Interactive Canva media	—	R&D; ASSURE	Beginning reading	Validation sheets; practicality/effectiveness tests	Product designed to be valid, practical, and effective.	R&D; small/local implementation.	Moderate
Faisy & Hartatik	2024	Indonesia	Grade IV	SDN Wonokromo I/390 Surabaya	Canva-supported materials	SQ3R	Classroom action research; 2 cycles	Reading comprehension	Comprehension tests; observation	Reading comprehension improved across cycles.	Canva effect cannot be separated from SQ3R.	Moderate
Utami et al.	2025	Indonesia	Grade IV	SD IT Mutiara Padang	Digital comics	—	R&D	Reading comprehension	Validation; practicality; reading test	High validity/practicality; N-gain reported as high.	Development design; localized sample.	Moderate
Hasmalia et al.	2025	Indonesia	Grade V	SD Negeri 78 Bakke	Educational game	Four-D	R&D; Four-D	Reading comprehension	Expert validation; observation; questionnaires; tests	Very high validity/practicality and improved test scores.	R&D; trials rather than controlled comparison.	Moderate
Amaliyah et al.	2025	Indonesia	Grade I	Elementary school; n=60	Interactive flashcards with cultural images	4D	R&D; 4D	Beginning reading; motivation	Validation; student motivation/readiness measures	High feasibility; reported improvement in reading and motivation.	Development-oriented; limited causal inference.	Moderate

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Author	Year	Country	Grade	Sample	Canva Media	Learning Model	Research Design	Reading Outcome	Instrument	Main Findings	Limitations	Quality
Mbuik et al.	2025	Indonesia	Grade III	SD Negeri Fontein 2	Canva learning media	—	Quasi-experimental; non-equivalent control group	Reading interest	Reading-interest questionnaire/pre-post comparison	Canva group showed greater improvement than traditional-method group.	Non-randomized; single school.	Moderate–High
Nawas et al.	2025	Indonesia	Grade III; n=30	SD Negeri 24 Temmalebba	Digital comics with Islamic values	ADDIE	R&D; ADDIE	Reading interest	Pre/post measures; gain score; response questionnaires	Reading interest improved and media received positive responses.	Small sample; R&D; no control group.	Moderate
Amanda et al.	2025	Indonesia	Grade II; n=22 + 1 teacher	Elementary school	Interactive Canva media	ADDIE	R&D; ADDIE	Reading literacy; interest/engagement	Validation; teacher/student responses; literacy activities	High feasibility with increased interest/engagement.	Small sample; development-focused.	Moderate
Mulyani & Apriliya	2026	Indonesia	Grade I	Elementary school	Interactive learning media	ADDIE	R&D; ADDIE	Beginning reading; attention/motivation	Validation; observation; student response	Valid/practical media supporting attention, motivation, and participation.	R&D; limited comparative evidence.	Moderate
Rusman et al.	2026	Indonesia	Grade III	Elementary school	Canva-based Big Book	—	R&D	Reading comprehension	Validation; practicality; comprehension activities	Positive validity/practicality and improvement in comprehension activities.	Development-focused; localized trial.	Moderate
Sari & Liansari	2026	Indonesia	Grade I; n=32	Elementary school	Canva media	—	Pre-experimental; one-group pretest-posttest	Beginning reading	Pre/post reading test	Significant pretest-posttest improvement reported.	No control group; pre-experimental.	Moderate
Brillianda et al.	2026	Indonesia	Grade V; n=99	Primary schools	Canva-integrated digital materials	RADEC + Forms	Quasi-experimental; non-equivalent control group	Interpretative comprehension; reading interest	Reading test + interest scale; group comparison	Significant effects on combined comprehension and reading-interest outcomes.	Canva combined with RADEC and Forms; non-randomized.	Moderate–High

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3.3. Implementation Patterns of Canva-Based Learning Media

Across the included studies, Canva-based learning media were implemented in diverse forms, including interactive multimedia, digital comics, flashcards, educational games, Big Books, posters, videos, and other visually oriented materials. Implementation also varied in pedagogical integration. Some studies used Canva primarily as a media-development platform, whereas others embedded Canva within instructional models such as SQ3R and RADEC. The reviewed implementations therefore indicate that Canva functions less as a standalone instructional method than as a flexible medium whose pedagogical contribution depends on how multimedia content, learning activities, assessment, and teacher guidance are organized.

3.4. Thematic Synthesis

Theme 1. Canva and Beginning Reading

Beginning reading was one of the most frequently investigated outcomes. Aulia et al. (2023) provide more direct comparative evidence for this outcome because the study used a post-test-only control-group design and reported higher performance in the Canva group. Ginayah et al. (2024), Maghfiroh and Hendratno (2024), Amaliyah et al. (2025), Mulyani and Apriliya (2026), and Sari and Liansari (2026) also reported positive outcomes from Canva-based materials. These studies demonstrate practical applications for integrating letters, syllables, words, images, audio, and interactive tasks into beginning-reading instruction. However, much of the evidence remains development-oriented. R&D studies are useful for establishing validity, practicality, usability, and preliminary effectiveness, but they do not provide causal evidence equivalent to controlled comparative experiments.

Theme 2. Canva and Reading Comprehension

Canva has also been applied to reading comprehension through digital comics, educational games, Big Books, and Canva-supported instructional models. Faisy and Hartatik (2024) combined Canva with SQ3R, while Brilliananda et al. (2026) integrated Canva with RADEC and Forms. Utami et al. (2025), Hasmalia et al. (2025), and Rusman et al. (2026) developed Canva-based products targeting comprehension. The reported outcomes are encouraging, but attribution remains difficult because the instructional effect may reflect the combined contribution of Canva, the pedagogical model, content organization, teacher implementation, and assessment design rather than Canva alone.

Theme 3. Canva, Reading Interest, Motivation, and Engagement

Reading interest, reading motivation, and reading engagement are related but conceptually distinct outcomes. Reading interest concerns students' inclination or preference toward reading; motivation concerns reasons and processes that energize and sustain reading activity; engagement concerns students' behavioral, cognitive, or affective involvement during learning. The reviewed studies-including Vidiawati and Istikomah (2023), Mbuik et al. (2025), Nawas et al. (2025), Amanda et al. (2025), and Brillianandа et al. (2026)-reported positive findings across these domains, but the measures and designs differed. The findings should therefore be interpreted as outcome-specific rather than as interchangeable evidence of a single general reading effect.

Theme 4. Development Evidence versus Effectiveness Evidence

The most important critical finding is the unequal strength of the evidence. Nine of the 15 studies are R&D studies. This distribution means that the literature is particularly informative about product development, validity, practicality, usability, and preliminary

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implementation, while providing fewer opportunities for strong causal inference. Comparative experimental and quasi-experimental studies are more directly informative for questions about effectiveness, but they remain a minority of the evidence base.

3.5. Quality Appraisal

Table 2. Qualitative quality appraisal categories.

Quality level	n	Interpretation
Moderate–High	3	Comparative experimental or quasi-experimental evidence with direct reading outcomes; provides more direct evidence for effectiveness questions.
Moderate	11	Relevant evidence, but commonly limited by R&D designs, small/local samples, short-term outcomes, or combined instructional components.
Moderate–Low	1	Relevant evidence with substantial limitations for causal interpretation.

For comparative outcome questions, three studies provide more direct evidence: Aulia et al. (2023), Mbuik et al. (2025), and Brillianandа et al. (2026). These studies combine comparative experimental or quasi-experimental designs with direct reading-related outcomes. This designation is operational rather than evaluative and does not constitute an overall ranking of study quality; the studies also have limitations that should be considered when interpreting their findings.

3.6. Integrated Evidence Mapping

The qualitative appraisal categories reported in Table 2 were used as the basis for interpreting evidence strength in the integrated evidence mapping below. These categories indicate the methodological and contextual strength of the available evidence rather than standardized risk-of-bias scores.

Table 3. Integrated evidence mapping of reported reading outcomes.

Reading outcome	Evidence direction	Qualitative evidence appraisal	Critical interpretation
Beginning reading	Predominantly positive	Moderate	Strong potential, but much evidence is R&D-based.
Reading comprehension	Predominantly positive	Moderate	Promising, but often combined with other pedagogical models.

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Reading outcome	Evidence direction	Qualitative evidence appraisal	Critical interpretation
Reading interest	Positive	Moderate–High	Supported by direct quasi-experimental evidence.
Reading motivation	Positive	Moderate	Often reported alongside beginning reading.
Reading engagement	Positive	Moderate	Associated with interactive multimedia features.
Reading literacy	Positive but limited	Moderate–Low	Positive direction, but too few studies for a strong general conclusion.
Long-term reading habits	Insufficient evidence	Insufficient evidence; no quality category assigned	Major evidence gap.

3.7. Theoretical Interpretation

The Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (CTML) explains why Canva can support literacy when verbal and visual information are deliberately coordinated. The ARCS Motivation Model provides a motivational explanation: multimedia design can attract attention, establish relevance, support confidence, and provide satisfaction. TPACK explains why the same platform can produce different instructional outcomes depending on teachers' ability to integrate technology, pedagogy, and literacy content. Thus, the evidence is best interpreted as a technology–pedagogy interaction rather than a simple platform effect (Keller, 2010; Mayer, 2021; Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

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3.8. Proposed Conceptual Framework

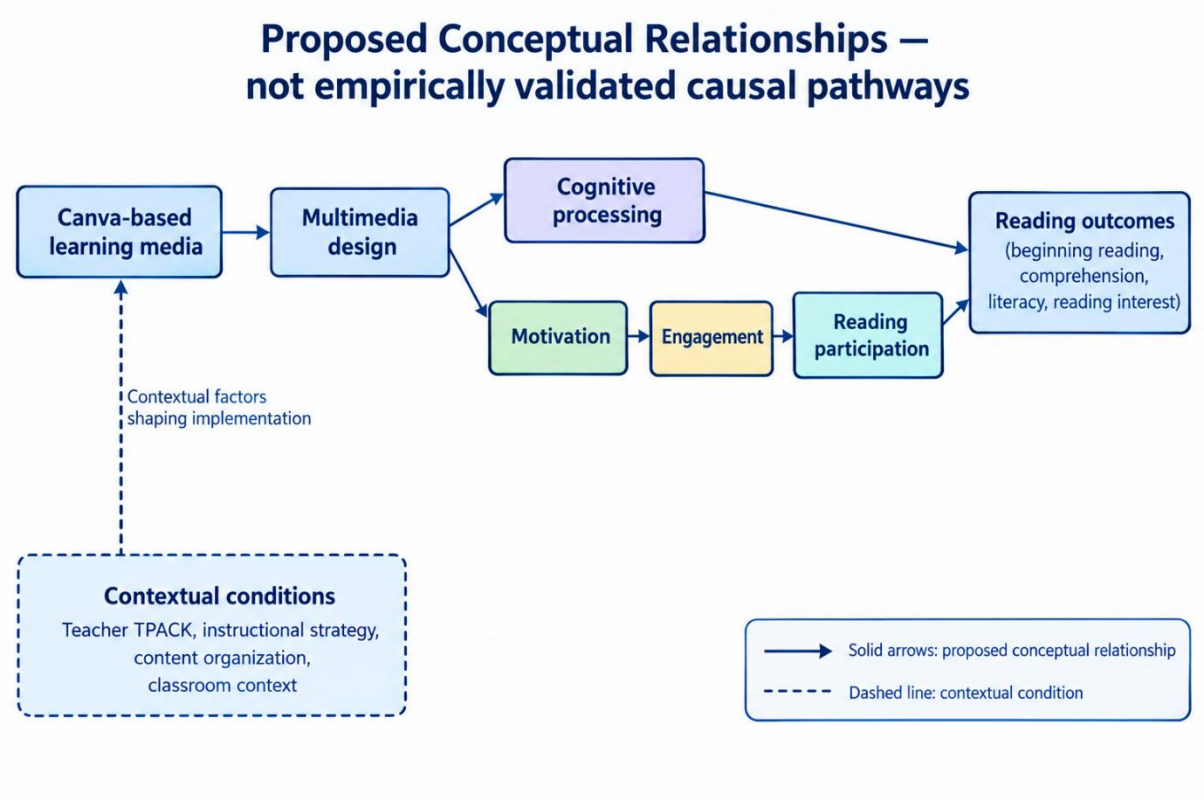


Figure 2. Integrated conceptual framework of Canva-based elementary reading instruction.

The framework proposes that Canva may contribute to reading outcomes through two linked but non-serial routes: multimedia design may shape cognitive processing, while multimedia design may also support motivation, engagement, and reading participation. Teacher TPACK, instructional strategy, content organization, and classroom context are treated as contextual conditions that may shape implementation. In this framework, reading participation is treated as a conceptual mechanism linking engagement to students' involvement in reading activities rather than as a consistently measured outcome across the included studies. The arrows in Figure 2 represent proposed conceptual relationships derived from the synthesis and relevant theory; they are not empirically validated causal pathways.

3.9. Research Gap

(1) *Methodological gap:* the evidence base is dominated by R&D designs, with comparatively few rigorous controlled studies.
(2) *Longitudinal gap:* most studies measure immediate or short-term outcomes rather than sustained reading habits.
(3) *Attribution gap:* Canva is often combined with SQ3R, RADEC, Forms, or other instructional components, making its independent contribution difficult to isolate.
(4) *Generalizability gap:* many studies use small samples and single-school contexts.
(5) *Theoretical gap:* few studies empirically test how multimedia design, motivation, engagement, and teacher competence interact.

3.10. Novelty and Research Agenda

The novelty of this review lies in its critical synthesis and conceptual integration rather than in proposing a new theory. The review distinguishes development evidence

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from comparative effectiveness evidence, organizes findings across multiple reading outcomes, and integrates multimedia design, cognitive processing, motivation, engagement, and teacher TPACK into a single conceptual interpretation. The resulting framework is intended to guide future empirical testing rather than to be treated as an established causal theory. A priority for future research is direct comparison among Canva-centered interventions, Canva-plus-pedagogy interventions, and alternative digital-media conditions so that attribution can be examined more clearly.

3.11. Practical Implications

Canva can be considered as a flexible instructional medium when its visual and interactive features are aligned with explicit reading objectives. For beginning reading, possible applications include letter-sound association, syllable practice, word recognition, and interactive flashcards. For comprehension, Canva can support digital comics, story sequencing, main-idea tasks, question-answer activities, and Big Books. The reviewed evidence also suggests that professional development should integrate Canva skills with literacy pedagogy, multimedia learning principles, assessment, and teacher decision-making rather than treating platform familiarity as sufficient. These implications should be adapted to local classroom conditions because the current evidence is concentrated in Indonesian elementary settings.

3.12. Limitations of the Review

This review has several limitations. First, only 15 studies met the eligibility criteria, and all were conducted in Indonesia with students in Grades I–V, which limits generalizability. Second, the evidence is highly heterogeneous in design, media format, learning model, outcome measure, and implementation context. Third, the archived search record does not preserve a complete database-specific search log, exact run dates, or line-by-line search strings for every source. Fourth, the retained screening and extraction files do not document independent duplicate reviewer procedures, so no inter-rater reliability is claimed. Fifth, the quality appraisal used a transparent qualitative rubric rather than a validated risk-of-bias instrument. Finally, no pooled effect size was calculated because the available studies did not provide sufficiently comparable designs and outcome measures.

4. CONCLUSION

This Critical Literature Review synthesized 15 empirical studies examining Canva-based learning media and multidimensional reading outcomes among elementary students. Positive findings were reported across beginning reading, reading comprehension, reading literacy, reading interest, motivation, and engagement, but the strength of evidence was not uniform. Because nine of the 15 studies used R&D designs, the current evidence is stronger for feasibility, validity, practicality, usability, and preliminary effectiveness than for an independently established causal effect of Canva.

Canva is best interpreted as a flexible pedagogical technology whose contribution may emerge through the interaction of multimedia design, cognitive processing, motivation, engagement, instructional strategy, content, and teacher competence. The frequent combination of Canva with other pedagogical components creates an attribution problem that remains unresolved in much of the literature. The proposed framework is therefore conceptual rather than causal, and future research should test it through stronger comparative, longitudinal, and theory-informed designs.

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5. AUTHORS' NOTE

Conflict of Interest. The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the publication of this article.

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Data Availability. The evidence synthesized in this review is derived from published studies. The 15 studies included in the qualitative synthesis represent the empirical studies that met the predefined eligibility criteria. The complete reference list is necessarily larger because it also contains background, theoretical, and methodological sources.

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