

English Learning in Primary School: A Review of the Literature on Teaching Methods and Strategies

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Abstract

This study aims to examine and synthesize various methods and strategies of learning English in elementary schools through the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. The data source was obtained from national and international journal articles published in the 2020–2025 period and discussed methods, strategies, and approaches to learning English for young learners. The results of the study show a significant shift from traditional approaches such as the Grammar Translation Method to communicative and student-centered approaches, such as Communicative Language Teaching, Task-Based Learning, Total Physical Response, Direct Method, and storytelling strategies. Communicative and contextual approaches have been shown to be more in line with the characteristics of elementary school students who are active, love concrete activities, and learn through social interaction. In addition, the integration of interactive digital media also increases student motivation and learning participation. However, the implementation of innovative strategies still faces challenges in the form of limited teacher competencies, large class sizes, and uneven infrastructure. Therefore, the use of an integrative approach that combines various methods contextually and adaptively is recommended to optimally improve students' communicative competence.



Keywords: Teaching Strategy, English Learning, Primary School, Systematic Literature Review.

INTRODUCTION

English learning at the elementary school level is one of the strategic issues in the development of national education in the midst of globalization and digital transformation. English language skills are no longer seen as an additional competency, but rather as a basic need to access global information, technology, and communication in the 21st century. In the context of basic education, the introduction of English serves as an initial foundation in building students' communicative competencies that include listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills gradually and integrated. Therefore, learning at this level must be designed systematically and in accordance with the developmental characteristics of elementary school age students (Waziana, 2024).

Pedagogically, elementary school students are included in the category of young learners who have unique characteristics, such as a relatively short attention span, the need for concrete activities, and a tendency to learn through games and hands-on experience. This condition requires teachers to apply varied, interactive, and contextual learning methods and strategies so that the learning process takes place effectively and enjoyably. English learning in elementary school is not enough to be oriented only to mastery vocabulary and grammatical structure, but it must also be able to create a learning environment that supports students' courage to communicate simply in the language (Lesia, 2021)

In the last five years, the academic literature has shown a shift in the approach to teaching English in primary schools. Traditional methods such as the Grammar Translation Method that focus on translation and memorization are starting to be abandoned, and replaced by communicative approaches and learner-centered learning (Hanif, 2025). Interactive learning strategies, the use of visual and digital media, multimodal approaches, and the integration of educational games are reported to be able to increase students' motivation and active participation in the learning process. In addition, teachers are also encouraged to integrate collaborative activities and experiential approaches to strengthen natural language understanding and acquisition (Asrianti, 2024).

Although various studies have examined the effectiveness of certain methods and strategies, the results of these studies are still scattered and do not fully provide a comprehensive overview of the synthesis, especially in the context of implementation in Indonesian elementary



schools. Some studies have placed more emphasis on practical aspects without linking them in depth to the theoretical framework of children's language acquisition, while other studies have focused on specific contexts that cannot necessarily be generalized. This condition indicates the need for a systematic literature review to identify the dominant methodological tendencies, evaluate empirical findings, and analyze their implications for English learning practices in elementary school (Sholikha, 2025).

Based on this background, this study aims to review and synthesize the results of research in the last five years regarding English teaching methods and strategies in elementary schools. This study is expected to provide a more structured understanding of the development of teaching approaches, challenges faced by teachers, and recommendations for the development of learning practices that are more effective and relevant to the needs of students.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to identify and synthesize research findings regarding English teaching methods and strategies in elementary schools. This approach was chosen because it is able to provide a structured and comprehensive picture of the development of studies in the field of language education, especially in the context of young learners (Sholikha, 2025). The data source was obtained from national and international journal articles published in the 2020–2025 period through browsing academic databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, and SINTA and Scopus indexed journals. The selection process is carried out through the stages of identification, screening of titles and abstracts, and review of complete texts in accordance with inclusion criteria, namely articles that explicitly discuss methods, strategies, or approaches to learning English at the elementary school level (Husein, 2025). The data obtained were then analyzed using descriptive thematic analysis techniques by grouping findings based on the type of teaching method, the dominant strategy used, the use of learning media, and the implications for student motivation and learning outcomes. The results of the synthesis were compared to find patterns, tendencies, and recommendations for effective learning practices in elementary schools (Islahuddin, 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Grammar Translation Method (GTM)

The Grammar Translation and Learning Method (GTM) is a traditional approach that teaches students by memorizing grammar rules and translating sentences from English into



Indonesian. This method is typically used in elementary schools to help young students aged 7 to 12 understand the basic structure of the language. This method utilizes exercises such as reading long texts, translating them accurately, and answering grammar questions, which are very helpful in teaching local content subjects according to the national curriculum (Z. Azzahra, 2024). This approach is similar to the way languages were taught in Europe in the 19th century, where languages were taught as a means of academic learning, not for everyday conversation

Although GTM is excellent in enriching passive vocabulary and understanding of grammar, such as recognizing tenses through translation, this method still has a noticeable deficiency in improving speaking and listening skills, because students rarely practice speaking spontaneously. Nisa, et al. (2024) said, "GTM provides a deep understanding of grammar, but lacks in communication skills," based on observations in elementary school classes where students memorize formulas but fail to speak in simple dialogues. In Indonesia, this method is still used in rural schools due to a lack of equipment and personnel, but it risks making students passive and afraid to speak incorrectly.

For better results, elementary school teachers are advised to combine GTM with short activities such as role-playing after translating, which can improve retention by up to 25% based on previous research. The implication for educators is the need to gradually transition to a hybrid method, in accordance with the Pancasila Student Profile, which emphasizes the ability to communicate boldly, so that GTM remains relevant as a foundation but not the sole tool (Z. Azzahra, 2024).

DIRECT METHOD

The Direct Method (DM) uses English directly without translation, through visual examples, questions and answers, and everyday conversations to train four basic skills in elementary school students. The teacher acts as a natural conversation model, providing basic information such as the names of objects while pointing to them, then students do repetition exercises independently. This method emerged from the need to replace GTM, inspired by children's natural learning methods, and is very appropriate for use in elementary school classes with a duration of 45 minutes that is active and fun.

The advantage of discussions via DM is that they improve speaking and comprehension skills, as students learn to directly connect words with their meanings, rather than abstract meanings. This teaching strategy, which requires teachers to provide basic data and explain the skills being taught, has proven effective in urban elementary schools in Indonesia in helping build



student confidence. However, the challenge is that it requires fluent teachers and a small class size, as this method is ineffective if students receive too much verbal information without visual aids (Nisa et al., 2024).

Practical applications in elementary schools using everyday objects like flashcards have increased learning enthusiasm and speaking test scores by up to 30%. Researchers believe that DM helps differentiate learning in today's digital age, where short YouTube videos can be a learning supplement, making it a primary choice in the practical-focused Independent Curriculum (A. S. Azzahra et al., 2024).

TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE (TPR)

Total Physical Response (TPR) combines verbal commands with physical actions. For example, when you say "stand," students will stand. This method uses the theory of learning through movement to help elementary school children reduce stress when learning a foreign language. This method was created by Asher in the 1960s, adopting the way children learn their native language. In this method, the teacher acts as the "commander" and students are asked to remain silent until they are ready to speak (Sukmiyanti & Musyadad, 2025). In 4th grade elementary school, TPR is very useful for enriching the vocabulary of actions and directions.

The study showed a real improvement: the average pretest score of 60 rose to a posttest of 85 in 10 students at SDN Lemah Duhur III after using the TPR method, because this method helps overcome difficulties in memorizing through movement (Sukmiyanti & Musyadad, 2025). "Research shows significant results before and after using the TPR method," with observations showing a 40% reduction in anxiety. Its weakness is that it's not adequate for handling complex grammar, but it's perfect for elementary school beginners.

Practical implications for elementary school teachers include implementing TPR for 20 minutes daily, combined with movement songs like "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes," which are suitable for large classes in Indonesia. This approach aligns with the active learning principles of the Independent Curriculum, which strengthens the abilities of students who enjoy learning through movement and supports children with special needs (Astutik & Aulina, n.d.).

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT)

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach focuses on real-life communication skills through various activities such as role-playing, information-gathering tasks, and group discussions. In this approach, elementary school students learn to use English for everyday



purposes, such as ordering food or asking for directions. In this approach, the teacher acts as a facilitator who creates a mini-communication environment in the classroom. In Indonesian elementary schools, the CLT approach is implemented through everyday conversations using local objects such as play money for shopping simulations, which is ideal for children aged 7 to 12 who desire social interaction.

In Indonesian elementary schools, the CLT approach is adapted to cultural themes such as "dialogue in a traditional market" or "gotong royong role-play," using real-world objects to increase relevance and strengthen vocabulary retention by up to 40%. Integration with the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum allows for performance-based assessment through video recordings of student conversations, in line with the Pancasila Student Profile, which emphasizes "effective communication" and "collaboration." Teachers can guide students with sentence structures such as "I like... because..." for beginners, while avoiding overly rigorous checking to maintain fluency, especially in schools in rural areas with minimal exposure to the native language (Nisa et al., 2024).

TASK-BASED LEARNING (TBL)

Task-Based Learning (TBL) organizes the learning process around real, meaningful tasks, such as "planning a class picnic" or "creating a simple restaurant menu," where students use English to achieve truly meaningful goals, rather than simply memorizing material. The TBL cycle is divided into three main stages: a pre-task phase (activating prior knowledge through discussion of a topic), a task phase (performing group tasks with a focus on fluent speaking skills), and a post-task phase (analyzing language, correcting errors, and reflecting). This approach was developed by Willis (1996) and adapted for use in Indonesian elementary schools. It encourages students to integrate the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in a natural way. This approach is suitable for elementary school students who learn through real-life experiences (Yamin, 2017).

The effectiveness of using TBL is proven by research in elementary schools, where students' average scores increased by 15 to 20 points on formative assessments because they saw language as a tool for communication, rather than a demanding academic task. Examples of tasks such as "surveying friends about hobbies" help students in grades 3 to 5 practice asking and answering wh-questions. Observations show up to a 40% increase in social interaction skills compared to traditional practice methods. A disadvantage of TBL is that it requires considerable preparation time for teachers.

In the context of Indonesian elementary school learning, TBL can be modified to suit local



themes, such as "shopping at a traditional market" using inexpensive tools, such as plastic fruit and vegetables. This not only makes the material more culturally relevant but also helps children feel more confident in speaking because the focus is on understanding, not perfect accuracy. Teachers can evaluate students using peer-assessment rubrics, where students provide feedback to each other, thereby strengthening Pancasila Student Profiles such as mutual cooperation and critical thinking. Literature studies also show that the use of TBL with technology such as Google Slides in assignment presentations is very effective in post-pandemic hybrid schools, as described in the Implementation of GTM in Elementary Schools, 2024.

STORYTELLING

Storytelling is a storytelling technique that uses easy-to-understand stories with the aid of pictures or visual elements such as large books, sequential images, or digital animations, to help elementary school students aged 7 to 12 years enrich vocabulary, train imagination, and understand the context of the story. This technique uses teachers to tell interactive stories such as "The Hungry Caterpillar" while involving students in guessing the ending, followed by group retelling, where students imitate the natural language acquisition process as children do. A good story is able to maintain the attention of students who have a short attention span, which is about 10 to 15 minutes per session. In addition, the story also contains a lot of contextual vocabulary repetition, such as 20 new words per story that are repeated in the narrative to facilitate comprehension, based on the English Language Learning Approach in Elementary School, 2024.

In Indonesian elementary schools, this strategy addresses the boredom of memorizing by telling stories based on local culture, such as "Malin Kundang" in English, which has been shown to improve retelling skills by up to 35% in grade 4. The downside is that it relies on the teacher's storytelling skills, but this can be improved by using simple scripts or free audio recordings from the British Council (Yamin, 2017).

DISCUSSION

A literature synthesis shows a significant shift from structural approaches such as the Grammar Perception Method (GTM) to communicative strategies (CLT, TBL), which better suit the characteristics of elementary school children. This shift reflects the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum approach, which focuses on experiential learning and communication skills (Nisa et al., 2024). The strongest findings came from the application of Total Physical Response (TPR) which showed an increase in scores from 60 to 85 in 4th grade students at SDN Lemah Duhur III, proving that the



kinesthetic strategy is effective in helping students overcome difficulties memorizing vocabulary for action verbs and directions (Sukmiyanti & Musyadad, 2025).

Adopting local themes was a key factor in success: discussions about "traditional markets" in CLT, surveys about "friends' hobbies" in TBL, and the use of the story "Malin Kundang" in storytelling helped increase cultural relevance and improve vocabulary retention by 35-40%. These contextual strategies not only enhanced the learning experience but also helped reduce speaking anxiety among elementary school students, who typically pay attention for only 10 to 15 minutes and prefer concrete, hands-on activities (Z. Azzahra, 2024).

The main challenges in implementing this include: (1) limited teacher capacity in rural areas who still rely on traditional teaching methods, (2) classes that are too large (more than 30 students) which makes it difficult to implement the CLT method, and (3) very long time to design task-based assignments. The recommendation of a hybrid GTM+CLT solution using free digital media such as Kahoot and Canva, as well as gradual training, is a practical option that is in accordance with the Pancasila Student Profile which emphasizes effective communication skills and mutual cooperation (Nisa et al., 2024).

Analysis of various teaching methods also shows that the effectiveness of English learning strategies for elementary school students is closely related to second language acquisition theory. Communication-based approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Learning (TBL) align with the interaction hypothesis proposed by Michael Long, which emphasizes that communicative interaction helps students acquire language through the process of negotiating meaning and feedback during communication (Li, 2020). In addition, task-based learning is also supported by recent empirical research showing that communicative activities significantly improve students' language complexity and fluency compared to purely structure-based learning. Meanwhile, the use of storytelling and context-based learning supports usage-based learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of meaningful language exposure in gradually building linguistic competence. This indicates that approaches providing authentic language experiences are more effective for elementary school students compared to memorization-oriented approaches.

Recent empirical studies also show that each learning method has different strengths and limitations depending on the learning objectives and the characteristics of the students. Research by Mahmoud Sabri Alasal (2025) indicates that a task-based approach significantly improves the communication skills of elementary school students compared to traditional grammar-based methods. However, other studies have found that explicit instruction on language structures is



still necessary to enhance students' grammatical accuracy. In addition, physically active approaches such as Total Physical Response have been proven effective in improving vocabulary retention and learning motivation at the early stages of language learning, especially for young students with a kinesthetic learning style (Putri, 2024). These findings confirm that the use of an integrated approach combining communicative learning and explicit learning is more effective than using a single method alone in English language learning at elementary schools.

The development of digital technology has also become an important factor in the development of English learning strategies in elementary schools. Recent research shows that the use of interactive digital media such as game-based learning applications, educational videos, and online platforms can increase students' motivation and engagement in the language learning process (Safitri, 2025). Furthermore, the integration of technology in language learning allows for the creation of a multimodal learning environment that supports various learning styles, including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. However, the implementation of technology in English learning at elementary schools still faces challenges such as limited infrastructure and teachers' digital competence, especially in areas with limited access to technology. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a learning model that integrates a communicative approach with the contextual use of digital technology in accordance with the educational conditions in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that English language learning in elementary schools has shifted from the traditional approach focused on mastering language structures to a communicative approach that is student-centered. Based on a systematic literature review of research conducted over the past five years, it was found that methods such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-Based Learning (TBL), Total Physical Response (TPR), the Direct Method, and storytelling are more suitable for the characteristics of elementary school students, who tend to learn through direct experiences, concrete activities, and social interaction. These approaches have been proven to enhance learning motivation, active participation, and students' communication skills compared to traditional methods such as the Grammar Translation Method, which focuses more on grammar mastery.

The study results also show that there is no single method that is completely effective for all learning objectives. Each method has its advantages and limitations that need to be adjusted according to the learning goals, student characteristics, and the learning conditions in schools. Therefore, the use of an integrated approach that combines various teaching methods



contextually becomes a more effective strategy in enhancing students' language competence comprehensively. In addition, the implementation of learning strategies based on local context, communicative activities, and the integration of digital technology has been proven to increase the relevance of learning and strengthen students' learning experience. However, the implementation of innovative methods still faces various challenges, such as limitations in teacher competence, large class sizes, and the lack of learning facilities in some areas.

SUGGESTION

Further research is recommended to examine more deeply the effectiveness of various English learning methods in elementary schools through empirical studies with experimental designs or longitudinal studies to understand the long-term impact on students' communicative competence. In addition, it is necessary to develop an integrative learning model that combines a communicative approach, task-based learning, kinesthetic activities, and contextual strategies based on local culture so that learning is more aligned with the characteristics of the students. Future research is also important to explore the use of digital technology in English learning, including teachers' readiness and the availability of infrastructure in different regions, as well as conducting a comparative study in various educational contexts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges in implementing English learning in Indonesia and to support the improvement of elementary school teachers' pedagogical competence.

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