



# Digital Storybook and Young Learners’ Reading Behavioral Engagement: A Systematic Review

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## Abstract

Reading behavioral engagement is an important aspect of students’ reading development, as it is reflected in observable behaviour such as attention, persistence, rereading, on task reading, and active interaction with the text. However, many young learners still struggle to maintain focus and active participation during reading activities, especially when using traditional reading material that rely heavily on text rather than visuals. Digital storybooks have emerged as an alternative reading material due to the integration of multimedia features that may support students’ engagement. This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) using the PRISMA framework to examine empirical studies published between 2020 and 2025 that investigated factors influencing young learners’ reading behavioral engagement through digital storybooks. Fourteen relevant articles were selected based on inclusion and exclusion criteria. The findings indicate that digital storybooks can effectively enhance students’ reading behavioral engagement when the multimedia features, such as narration, illustrations, and interactivity are well designed and aligned with pedagogical goals. Behavioral engagement is further strengthened through culturally relevant content, structured reading activities and teacher guidance. In contrast, excessive integrated multimedia may distract learners and reduce engagement. These findings provide a clearer framework for understanding how multimedia features influence young learners reading behavioral engagement. Overall, the study highlights the importance of thoughtful multimedia design and instructional support in digital reading contexts.

**Keywords:** Digital Storybooks; Reading Behavioral Engagement; Multimedia Features; Young Learners

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## 1. Introduction

Reading is widely recognized as a foundational skill that can support students’ academic success and long-term learning development. Research consistently shows that children who demonstrate strong engagement during reading activities are more likely to develop better comprehension and sustain their interest in literacy (Guthrie, 2004; McGeown & Smith, 2024). One essential dimension of reading engagement is reading behavioral engagement, which refers to students’ observable actions during reading, such as maintaining



attention, rereading, showing persistence, navigating text actively, and responding to reading tasks (Fredricks et al., 2004). These behavioral indicators are crucial because they reflect students' motivation, effort, and the depth of their interaction with the reading material. Mahayanti et al (2017) further highlight that reading is often viewed as a cognitive skill with limited instructional strategies to promote active involvement, which can hinder students' engagement during reading activities. However, many young learners still struggle to stay focused and participate when reading. This highlights the importance of examining the factors that can support behavioral engagement in reading.

Despite the efforts to promote literacy in various educational settings, many students continue to experience challenges in sustaining engagement during reading activities. Studies show that young learners often face difficulties in maintaining attention, they become easily distracted and often lose interest when reading traditional text that lack visual and interactive elements (Bergdahl & Nouri, 2020). This lack of behavioral engagement is reflected in short attention spans, limited persistence, and minimal active interaction with the texts. This can hinder student's ability to remain on task during reading activities. Similarly, many students also show low persistence when reading difficult texts that can lessen their engagement in reading (Barber et al., 2015). These challenges suggest that traditional reading materials often fail to capture students' attention and active participation, indicating the need for technological support (Nitiasih et al., 2022; Wiranatha & Santosa, 2024). This is aligned with recent educational developments and the contexts of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 in which, the implementation of Indonesia's 2013 curriculum has encouraged the integration of innovative and interactive digital media into classroom learning (Ardaningsih & Adnyayanti, 2022; Nitiasih & Budiarta, 2021).

To address these challenges, many researchers have increasingly explored the use of digital reading materials, particularly digital storybooks as an alternative reading medium that allows children to actively engage while reading (Irawati, 2018; Son & Butcher, 2024). Research indicates that multimedia elements can support reading behavioral engagement by guiding student's attention, encouraging sustained reading, and promoting active interaction with the text rather than passive reception (Ratminingsih et al., 2020; Takacs et al., 2015). For young learners, interactive storybooks can provide a more stimulating environment that encourages exploration, sustained attention and repeated reading that are essential to reading behavioral engagement (Angraini & Mustadi, 2024). Therefore, digital storybooks represent an effective medium for promoting active participation in reading among young learners.

Existing studies have also examined various features of digital storybooks that contribute to students' behavioral engagement. For example, multimedia and visual elements such as animations and appealing illustrations have been found to increase attention and focus during reading (Shabiriani et al., 2023; Takacs et al., 2015). Not only that, culturally relevant content also plays an important role, as stories set in familiar contexts can help maintain interest and support sustained attention throughout the reading process (Gunayasa et al., 2023). Pedagogical structure such as pre reading and post reading activities or clear instructional sequence has been shown to support students' concentration and guide their reading behaviour (Fridayanti et al., 2023). Teacher support similarly contributes to behavioral engagement by encouraging persistence, providing scaffolding and helping students to navigate digital texts effectively (Naresti et al., 2024). Additionally, interactive features like clickable hotspots or navigation controls can stimulate active reading behaviour such as exploration and rereading (Smeets & Bus, 2015). Although these studies offer useful findings, many of them examine



single aspects of digital storybooks rather than explaining how the overall design supports students behavioral engagement.

While research on digital storybooks has grown significantly, there remains a significant gap in how various design and contextual factors together influence reading behavioral engagement in young learners. Most existing studies examine limited aspects, such as multimedia features, cultural relevance, and teacher guidance without integrating findings into a comprehensive framework that explains how these factors relate to behavioral indicators such as attention, persistence, rereading and active navigation. As a result, there is still limited systematic research that brings these findings together, especially in relation to reading behavioral engagement. To address this research gap, the present study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) aims to synthesize empirical findings on the factors that influence reading behavioral engagement in digital storybooks among young learners. The findings are expected to offer practical insights for educators and future researchers seeking to design or implement digital storybooks that meaningfully support students' reading behavioral engagement.

## **2. Method**

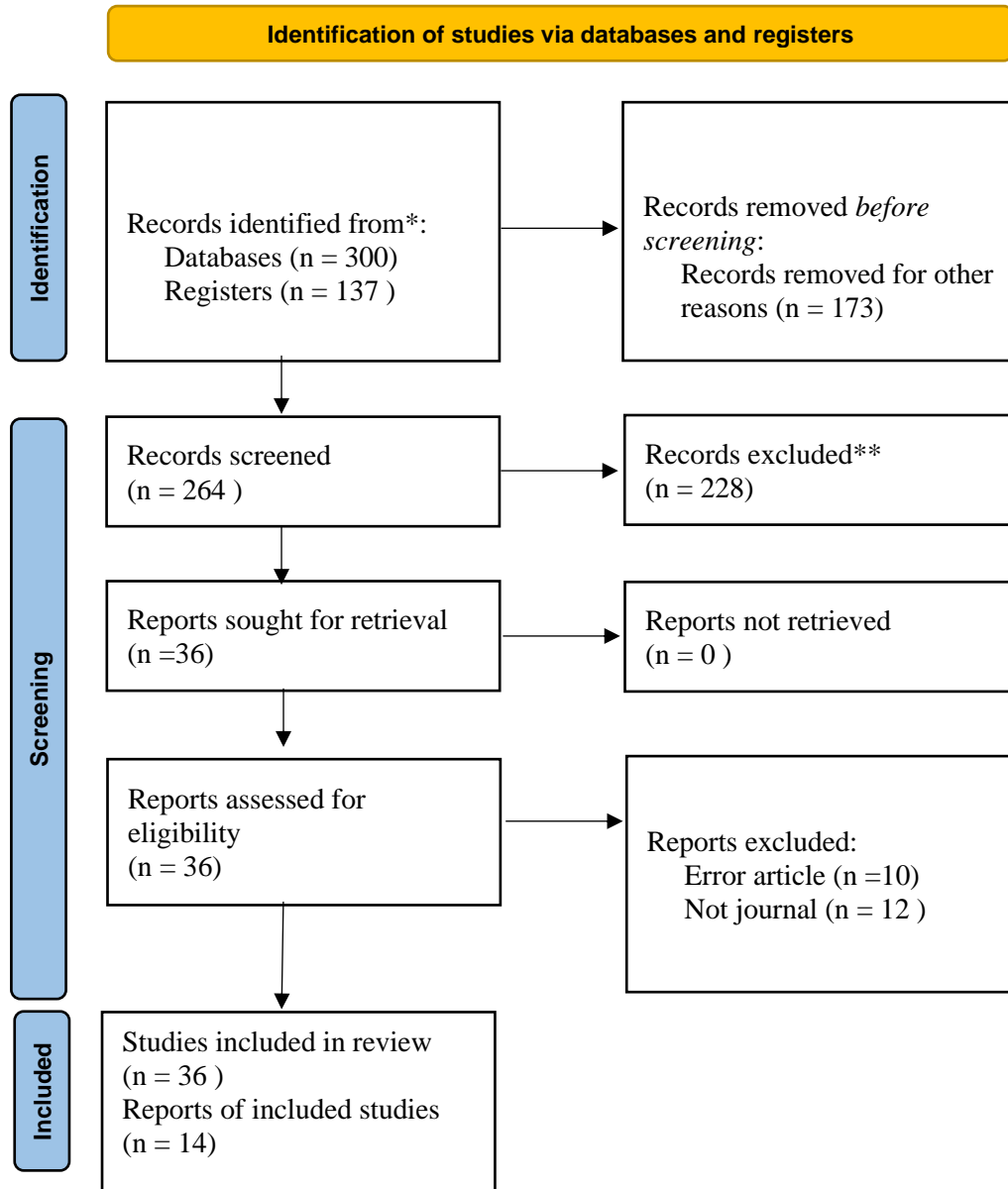
This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to systematically review studies on factors influencing young learners' reading behavioral engagement through digital storybooks. An SLR provides a structured approach to identify, evaluate, and interpret existing studies in order to answer specific research questions and offer a comprehensive overview of current evidence. Data were collected from peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020-2025, retrieved from databases including Publish or Perish. The search strategy used keywords such as digital storybook, reading behavioral engagement, multimedia features and young learners. The PRISMA framework guided the process of identification and screening, resulting in 14 articles for analysis.

The systematic literature review was conducted to explore factors within digital storybooks that influence elementary students' reading behavioral engagement. Following the PRISMA procedure, the researcher initially identified 300 articles through Publish or Perish software using keywords such as digital storybooks, multimedia features and reading behavioral engagement. After the identification, filtering and eligibility screening stages, only fourteen articles met the inclusion criteria. These articles were selected based on publication year 2020-2025, relevance to digital storybooks, multimedia features, and the examination of reading behavioral engagement, particularly behavioral indicators. Articles that focus on printed books, non-storybook, storytelling tools or reading fluency without engagement indicators were excluded. The selected studies represent diverse methodological approaches such as: quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods and were conducted across various educational settings. The articles collectively examine how multimedia components, visual design and pedagogical structure influence the observable behavioral engagement of young learners.

After the final selection of the fourteen articles, a structured data extraction process was conducted. Key information from each study, including authors, publication years, research design, participants, multimedia features, behavioral engagement, and main findings were systematically recorded in a data extraction table to ensure consistency. The extracted data were then analyzed to identify patterns, similarities, and differences across studies. Table 1 provides a detailed overview of the included studies including participant, results, and engagement. This

table serves as the foundation for systematizing the patterns and answering the research questions of this review.

Figure 1. The PRISMA Model



To select the articles that suit the research objectives, the researcher set a series of selection criteria. These criteria consist of two categories, namely: factors that are conditions for acceptance and factors that are reasons for article rejection. Applying these criteria allows researchers to focus the review on the topics that are most relevant and useful for the study.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

| Inclusion | Exclusion |
|-----------|-----------|
|-----------|-----------|



|  |   |
|--|---|
| Studies focusing on digital storybook or digital narrative reading media   | Studies focusing on printed books or text books                       |
| Studies investigating multimedia features of digital storybooks  | Studies do not investigate multimedia features on digital storybooks. |
| Studies examining reading behavioral engagement such as: attention, persistence, time on task, and voluntary rereading | Studies do not examine reading behavioral engagement                  |
| Studies using scientific research methods such as quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods                          | Non-scientific sources such as opinion and essay                      |
| Published in peer reviewed journal articles  | Not published in journal  |
| Published between 2020 and 2025  | Not published between 2020 and 2025                                   |

The table shows the criteria used to include and exclude studies in this review. Only empirical studies on digital storybooks published between 2020-2025 that examined multimedia features and reading behavioral engagement were included. Studies that did not meet these criteria were excluded.

### 3. Findings

The selected articles in this review have examined the use of digital storybooks as reading media provided with multimedia elements such as narration, animations, illustrations and interactive features. Previous studies highlight that the digital features can support students' reading processes by making stories clearer, more engaging and easier to follow. In this case, the focus of this review includes several important aspects related to behavioral engagement such as attention, persistence, rereading and on task activity. The results of the reviewed studies show that digital storybooks have a consistent positive effect on enhancing students behavioral engagement in reading. Further details regarding the findings from each selected study are presented in table 2, which provides a clearer overview of the research results.

Table 2. The Overview of Related Study

| No | Author                     | Participant | Result    | Findings  |
|----|----------------------------|-------------|-----------|---|
| 1. | Nurhidayah & Wibowo (2025) | Grade 4     | Effective | Multimedia elements such as: images, audio, and narration were found influence reading behavioral engagement by sustaining attention and encouraging continue on task reading.                    |
| 2. | Bus Anstadt (2021)         | & Age 4-5   | Effective | Interactive features like zooming and self-paced navigation supported reading behavioral engagement by allowing students to regulate their reading process and maintain attention during reading. |
| 3. | Asih et al (2024)          | Grade 4     | Effective | Visual, audio and interaction features can boost reading behavioral participation.  |



|     |                         |                     |           |  |
|-----|-------------------------|---------------------|-----------|--|
| 4.  | Furenes et al (2021)    | Age 1-8             | Effective | Story consistent multimedia sustained attention and irrelevant features distracted.  |
| 5.  | Kamil et al., (2023)    | Grade 4             | Effective | Images, sound, and storyline increased reading behavioral engagement.  |
| 6.  | Pujiani et al (2022)    | Kindergarten        | Effective | Narration, glossary and illustrations stimulated reading behavioral engagement.  |
| 7.  | Hendratno et al (2022)  | Grade 1-2           | Effective | Interactive storybooks enhanced reading behavioral engagement by promoting sustained attention and active interaction with the text. |
| 8.  | Rahmawati et al (2024)  | Elementary students | Effective | Teacher facilitation increased persistence and attention when reading.   |
| 9.  | Shabiriani et al (2023) | Grade 5             | Effective | Colorful illustration attracted initial attention with reading.  |
| 10. | Gunayasa et al (2023)   | Grade 4-5           | Effective | Cultural relevance sustained attention and engagement while reading.   |
| 11. | Naresti et al (2024)    | Elementary students | Effective | Teacher scaffolding strengthened reading behavioral engagement.  |
| 12. | Yundari et al (2025)    | Elementary students | Effective | Picture e-storybook encourage voluntary reading which reflect students willingness to engage with the texts independently.           |
| 13. | Sulastri et al (2024)   | Elementary students | Effective | ICT based interactive digital storybook supported active interaction and persistence during reading.                                 |
| 14. | Megawati et al (2025)   | Early childhood     | Effective | Interactive storybook promoted active involvement while reading when features were aligned with learning objective .                 |

Overall, the findings demonstrate a consistent pattern indicating that multimedia features in digital storybooks positively influence young learners' behavioral engagement. Across the reviewed studies, elements such as narration, animations, illustrations and interactive features were found to enhance attention, sustain persistence, and encourage on-task reading behaviours. Most studies reported that when multimedia elements were meaningfully integrated with the storyline, students showed longer reading duration and greater focus during reading activities.

A closer examination of the findings reveals that not all multimedia features function equally. Studies such as Furenes et al (2021) highlight that story consistent multimedia elements effectively sustained attention, whereas irrelevant features could distract the students. This suggests that the pedagogical alignment of multimedia components plays a crucial role in promoting behavioral engagement. Similarly, interactive features such as zooming, self-paced navigation and clickable elements supported students' self-regulation, which contributed to increased persistence and voluntary reading. Furthermore, several studies emphasize the importance of instructional support in maximizing the benefit of digital storybooks. Teacher facilitation and scaffolding were found strengthen students' engagement, indicating that digital features alone are not sufficient without appropriate guidance. Cultural relevance and alignment with learning objectives also important in influencing engagement. Overall, the findings suggest that behavioral engagement is influenced not only by the presence of multimedia features but also their design, quality, relevance and instruction integration.



#### **4. Discussion**

The research question addressed in this study focuses on how multimedia features in digital storybooks, cultural relevance and teacher guidance influence young learners' reading behavioral engagement. Through a systematic literature review process, the researcher identified fourteen articles that met the selection criteria. Table 2 presents the studies included in this review that examine how multimedia features of digital storybooks, cultural relevance and teacher guidance influence young learners reading behavioral engagement. Based on the review of these studies, the findings consistently indicate that multimedia features of digital storybooks positively influence young learners observable reading behavioral engagement, including attention, persistence, on-task reading, voluntary participation and rereading. However, these effects depend on how multimedia features are designed, integrated and supported during reading activities.

Several studies conducted in Indonesian school contexts indicate that the use of digital storybooks creates learning conditions that support young learners reading behavioral engagement. Moreover, students demonstrated positive behavioral responses during reading activities including longer attention spans, on-task reading, and greater willingness to interact with the texts. This strengthens reading behavioral engagement and suggest that digital storybook can help to sustain attention during reading (Kamil et al., 2023). Reading behavioral engagement is further reflected in ability to stay focused and interact more actively with digital texts when compared to printed reading material, which indicates stronger persistence and on task reading behaviour (Nurhidayah & Wibowo, 2025). In addition, Asih et al (2024) reported that the perception of e-storybooks as fun, interactive and suitable for classroom use encourages willingness to participate voluntarily and continue to read the materials, which reflects stronger reading behavioral engagement. Taken together, these studies consistently show that multimedia features influence how students behave during reading by supporting attention, persistence, and active interaction with the texts. However, the extent to which these behavioral responses appear depends on purposeful multimedia design and instructional support and not only on the presence of digital features.

This behavioral pattern is particularly evident at the initial stage of reading engagement where the visual design functions as an entry point that captures attention before sustained interaction with the text occurs. In line with this view, Shabiriani et al (2023) reported that colorful illustrations captured initial attention that is essential for engaging young learners. This finding aligns with the results of Yundari et al., (2025) who demonstrated that picture e-storybook can significantly enhance learners' reading interest and autonomous learning. Collectively, these studies suggest that visually rich digital storybooks not only attract sinitial attention but also support sustained behavioral engagement through independent exploration and reading activities.

Beyond attention and motivation, behavioral engagement is reflected in learners active interaction with the texts and their persistence during reading activities. Interactive multimedia features encourage learners to engage more actively with digital texts by fostering observable reading behavior instead of passive engagement with the text. This pattern is evident in studies examining how specific interactive controls influence students' reading actions. Bus & Anstadt (2021) showed that features such as zooming and controlled pacing support sustained engagement by allowing learners to regulate content navigation and processing. When these interactive elements are integrated into classroom reading, students demonstrate higher task



engagement, particularly when digital storybooks require active responses instead of passive viewing (Hendratno et al., 2022). Overall, the evidence indicates that interactive features such as controlling navigation and pacing contribute to sustained engagement particularly when digital storybooks are designed to encourage active responses during classroom reading

A similar pattern is observed in Indonesian school contexts, where behavioral engagement is shown through similar interactive responses during reading activities. Pujiani et al (2022) found that narration, glossary features and illustrations can support active participation among young learners during reading activities. This engagement is further strengthened in ICT-based interactive storybook that enable meaningful interaction with the story content and support persistence throughout the reading process (Sulastri et al., 2024). Similarly, (Megawati et al., 2025) emphasized that interactive storybook media promote active involvement and sustained engagement only when interactive features are aligned with learning objectives rather than serving as non-essential elements. Overall, these studies indicate that behavioral engagement occurs not from the simple presence of multimedia features but from how interactivity is designed to shape students' behavioral engagement during reading.

In addition to multimedia features, behavioral engagement is strengthened when digital reading activities are supported by clear pedagogical structure and instructional guidance. Structured reading stages help students maintain focus and reduce off-task behavior when interacting with texts that include multimedia elements. Instructional guidance also contributes in sustaining behavioral engagement during digital reading. Rahmawati et al (2024) further showed that teacher facilitation increased attention and persistence by supporting them throughout digital reading activities. Likewise, Naresti et al (2024) found that guided teacher support helps the students engage more purposefully with digital texts, particularly when multimedia features were involved. Thus, these findings indicate that multimedia features contribute most effectively to behavioral engagement when they are embedded within pedagogically guided reading environments rather than used independently.

However, the reviewed studies also suggest that multimedia features may reduce behavioral engagement if they are irrelevant, excessive or poorly integrated. Furenes et al (2021) found that stories that match the multimedia elements can sustain attention, where the irrelevant features distract learners and reduced engagement. Similar concerns were raised by Bus & Anstadt (2021) who noted that inappropriate multimedia features can disrupt students' focus, and in Indonesian contexts Gunayasa et al (2023) highlighted that besides multimedia features, cultural relevance is essential for maintaining learners' attention, as culturally familiar content helps learners stay engaged throughout the reading process. These findings suggest that multimedia does not automatically enhance behavioral engagement, its effectiveness depends on how well the digital storybooks match with the cognitive levels, relevance and the story content. Together, the findings discussed above indicate that the influence of digital storybooks on reading behavioral engagement is closely related to how multimedia features are designed, integrated and supported during reading activities. The review studies consistently show that multimedia elements contribute to behavioral engagement when they support attention, persistence, rereading and active interaction with texts. At the same time, these findings highlight that multimedia features alone do not guarantee engagement, as the impact is shaped by pedagogical guidance, cultural relevance and cognitive levels. This review identifies key conditions that enable digital storybooks to support young learners reading behavioral engagement.



Despite the valuable insights provided by this systematic literature review, several limitations should be acknowledged. This review included only fourteen studies, which may not fully represent the scope of research on digital storybooks and reading behavioral engagement. In addition, many of the reviewed studies were conducted in specific educational and cultural contexts particularly young learners in Indonesia which may limit variations in research designs and measurement instruments across studies may also have influenced the consistency of reported outcomes. Moreover, this review focused on behavioral engagement excluding cognitive and emotional dimensions of reading engagement. Therefore, future research could explore digital storybooks across more diverse contexts to better understand the long-term effects of multimedia features. From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the importance of pedagogical guidance and structured reading activities when implementing digital storybooks as well as the need for purposeful multimedia design that support young learners reading behavioral engagement. Overall, this systematic literature review contributes to the field by synthesizing empirical evidence on how multimedia design, visual features and pedagogical structure collectively support young learners reading behavioral engagement by providing a clearer foundation for the future research and educational practice.

## **5. Conclusion and Suggestion**

This systematic literature review was conducted to address the growing need to understand how digital storybooks support young learners' reading behavioral engagement by systematically reviewing empirical evidence from previous studies. The findings demonstrate that digital storybooks have strong potential to enhance young learners' observable reading behavioral engagement, particularly attention, persistence, voluntary rereading, on task reading, and active navigation. When the multimedia features such as narration, illustration, animation and interactive elements are designed to facilitate the reading process. Importantly this review reveals that behavioral engagement is not generated only by multimedia design but is strengthened when these features are supported by teacher guidance, are culturally relevant, cognitively appropriate, and integrated with clear pedagogical structure. In contrast, multimedia elements that are irrelevant to instructional goals may distract students' engagement during reading activities.

By employing a systematic literature review approach this study contributed to the field by offering a comprehensive review of how multimedia design, cultural relevance and instructional support can influence the reading behavioral engagement among young learners. Based on this insight, educators are encouraged to implement digital storybooks with structured instructional strategies that are aligned with educational purposes to guide students' reading behavioral engagement. Future research is recommended to further explore how specific combinations of digital features and instructional contexts influence observable reading behavioral engagement across different educational levels.

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