

Closing The Literacy Gap In Remote Indonesia: A Reading Corner Intervention To Improve Elementary Students' Reading Interest And Literacy Skills

Inggrid A. A. Anin

Master's Program in Biology Education, Postgraduate Faculty, Universitas Patompo

Andi Nur Samsi

Master's Program in Biology Education, Postgraduate Faculty, Universitas Patompo

Andi Andariana

Master's Program in Biology Education, Postgraduate Faculty, Universitas Patompo

Corresponding Author: inggridanin575@gmail.com

Abstract

*Reading interest and literacy skills among Indonesian elementary students remain persistently low, and schools in remote regions face the added constraint of limited access to a school library. This study examined whether a low-cost, in-classroom reading corner improves fifth-grade students' reading interest and literacy skills at SD YPK Kanda, Waibu District, Jayapura Regency, Papua. A quantitative, pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design was used with all 30 fifth-grade students as a total sample. Reading interest was measured with a 20-item Likert questionnaire; literacy skills were assessed through five indicators: fluency, comprehension, identifying main ideas, answering text-based questions, and retelling. Data were tested for normality (Shapiro-Wilk) and evaluated using paired-samples *t*-tests, normalized gain (*N*-gain), and effect size *r*. Mean reading interest increased significantly from 51.03 to 63.83, $t(29) = -24.032$, $p < .001$, *N*-gain = .442 (moderate), $r = .976$ (large). Mean literacy skills increased significantly from 57.83 to 74.50, $t(29) = -13.548$, $p < .001$, *N*-gain = .395 (moderate), $r = .929$ (large). All 30 students improved on both outcomes, with the largest gains on students' willingness to seek or borrow reading material and on answering text-based questions. These findings indicate that a well-managed reading corner, even without funding for a formal library, can meaningfully strengthen both the motivational and cognitive sides of early literacy. Sustainable*

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implementation should combine collection rotation, student choice, a consistent reading routine, and comprehension follow-up activities.

Keywords: reading corner; reading interest; literacy skills; elementary education; remote schools

INTRODUCTION

Literacy is widely recognized as a foundational determinant of educational quality, shaping reading and writing competence as well as the critical-thinking skills twenty-first-century learning demands. National surveys show this foundation is fragile in Indonesia: only about half of Indonesian students demonstrate high reading interest, with the remainder more drawn to entertainment-oriented digital activities than to books (Puslitpen Pendidikan, 2021). At the elementary level, where students are transitioning from "learning to read" to "reading to learn," a weak literacy foundation threatens comprehension across every other subject, not reading alone.

A growing body of evidence points to the classroom literacy environment, rather than individual aptitude alone, as a key lever for change: classrooms that make reading material visible and inviting tend to produce more frequent reader-text interaction, supporting the habit formation underlying both reading interest and literacy growth (Rahim, 2008; Tampubolon, 1991). The reading corner -- a book-stocked space inside the classroom rather than a separate library building -- is one of the most accessible forms of this environment, consistent with Indonesia's School Literacy Movement policy of embedding a daily reading habit into classroom routines (Kemendikbudristek, 2021), and is especially relevant outside Indonesia's urban centers, where many schools lack a functioning library altogether.

At SD YPK Kanda, in Waibu District, Jayapura Regency, Papua, a reading corner had already been installed, yet preliminary observation in January 2026 found it used only sporadically: students more often chose play or gadgets over the available books, and the existing collection was judged unappealing and poorly matched to student interests. This combination of an underused resource and a resource-constrained setting makes the school a useful case for a practical question with relevance for literacy policy in under-resourced regions generally: can simply activating an existing reading corner move the needle on both reading interest and literacy skills?



This study therefore examined the effect of reading corner utilization on fifth-grade students' reading interest and literacy skills at SD YPK Kanda, testing the hypotheses set out at the end of the next section.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Reading Corner as a Classroom Literacy Environment

A reading corner is a dedicated area within a classroom, stocked with age-appropriate reading material, designed to extend the function of the school library into daily instructional space (Aminulloh & Dharma, 2016). Within Indonesia's School Literacy Movement framework, it is positioned as a low-cost way to broaden access to reading material and support the daily reading habit mandated by national policy (Kemendikbud, 2016; Kemendikbudristek, 2021). Evidence from other Indonesian elementary schools links active reading-corner use to measurable gains in reading interest and literacy (Faisal & Hadi, 2018; Kurniawan & Hidayah, 2021; Putri & Zubaidah, 2020; Sari & Puspita, 2021; Sulaiman & Iskandar, 2019), though a reading corner functions as an effective intervention only when actively curated rather than left as a static shelf (Hijrawatil & Nurmaya, 2020; Megawati & Wulandari, 2017).

Reading Interest and Literacy Skills

Reading interest is commonly defined as a voluntary psychological disposition toward reading, marked by enjoyment, attention, engagement, and an active desire to read (Dalman, 2014; Slameto, 2015). Classical learning-psychology accounts suggest that such interest develops through repeated positive engagement with a stimulus: when access to reading material is frequent and low-effort, approach behavior toward books is reinforced and gradually consolidates into a stable habit (Makmoon Khairani, 2017; Skinner, 1953). A reading corner operationalizes this directly, lowering the practical cost of starting to read (Wulandari et al., 2023). Literacy skills, meanwhile, refer to students' capacity to read fluently and to comprehend, interpret, and communicate textual information -- fluent decoding, comprehension, identifying main ideas, answering text-based questions, and retelling (Rahim, 2008). These skills are mutually reinforcing with reading interest: more frequent practice builds decoding automaticity, freeing cognitive resources for comprehension, while comprehension-oriented follow-up such as questioning and retelling requires students to actively select and reorganize information



(Nugroho, 2020), a reciprocal relationship documented in prior Indonesian elementary-level research (Nugroho, 2020; Wulandari et al., 2023).

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

This study conceptualizes reading corner utilization as the entry point into a two-stage process: closer, more inviting book access increases reading interaction, which drives up reading interest; the reading practice this interest sustains then builds literacy skill through repeated exposure and active comprehension work. Three hypotheses were tested: (H1) reading corner utilization significantly improves reading interest; (H2) it significantly improves literacy skills; and (H3) it significantly improves both jointly among fifth-grade students at SD YPK Kanda.

METHOD

Research Design and Participants

This study used a quantitative, pre-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design, measuring a single group before and after a reading-corner intervention with no separate control group. The entire fifth-grade cohort -- all 30 students at SD YPK Kanda, Waibu District, Jayapura Regency -- was taken as a total (saturated) sample, leaving no basis for a within-school comparison group; all 30 completed both pretest and posttest, so none were excluded. The intervention ran approximately two months (April-May): students completed baseline measures, then engaged with the reading corner through daily access to a curated book collection, student-directed selection, a 10-15 minute reading routine, and structured comprehension follow-up, after which posttest measures were collected. Because the design lacks a control group, "effect" here denotes a statistically reliable within-group change, not a fully isolated causal claim.

Instruments and Data Analysis

Reading interest was measured with a 20-item Likert questionnaire (range 20-80) covering five indicators -- enjoyment, attention, frequency, the desire to seek or borrow books, and engagement. Literacy skills were measured through a mixed multiple-choice and short-response test (scaled 0-100) built from five aspects: fluency, comprehension, identifying main ideas, answering text-based questions, and retelling (Arikunto, 2018). Normality was tested with the Shapiro-Wilk test ($\alpha = .05$), and hypotheses were tested using paired-samples t-tests, scored as pretest minus posttest so a negative t indicates a posttest increase. Effectiveness was further



quantified using normalized gain (N-gain; Hake, 1999: high > .7, moderate .3-.7, low < .3) and effect size r (Cohen, 1988). All analyses used SPSS version 24.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Results

Mean reading interest rose from 51.03 (SD = 6.41) at pretest to 63.83 (SD = 5.72) at posttest, a gain of 12.80 points (25.08% relative to baseline). All 30 students scored higher at posttest, with no student flat or declining, and the posttest distribution was slightly more homogeneous. At the indicator level, every component increased, led by the desire to seek or borrow books (+2.83), followed by attention to reading material (+2.67), engagement (+2.50), reading frequency (+2.47), and enjoyment (+2.33) -- a pattern in which the largest shift occurred in approach behavior rather than affect alone.

Mean literacy skills rose from 57.83 (SD = 8.58) at pretest to 74.50 (SD = 9.86) at posttest, a gain of 16.67 points (28.82%). All 30 students improved, though the posttest standard deviation was larger, indicating that while every student gained, the size varied (5 to 30 points) -- a signal that tiered support remains necessary for slower-improving students. At the indicator level, the largest gain was in answering text-based questions (+0.93), followed by reading fluency (+0.67), comprehension (+0.63), identifying main ideas (+0.63), and retelling (+0.47), the smallest, suggesting that reorganizing and re-expressing information in one's own words remains the most demanding sub-skill for this age group.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Reading Interest and Literacy Skills (N = 30)

Variable	Stage	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Reading interest	Pretest	51.03	6.41	36	64
Reading interest	Posttest	63.83	5.72	54	78
Literacy skills	Pretest	57.83	8.58	40	75
Literacy skills	Posttest	74.50	9.86	55	95

Source: Data processed with SPSS, 2026.



Normality Test

Shapiro-Wilk tests confirmed pretest and posttest scores for both variables did not differ significantly from a normal distribution (all $p > .05$), satisfying the assumption for paired-samples t-testing (Table 2).

Table 2. Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test Results

Variable	Stage	W	df	Sig.	Decision
Reading interest	Pretest	.985	30	.935	Normal
Reading interest	Posttest	.972	30	.599	Normal
Literacy skills	Pretest	.962	30	.355	Normal
Literacy skills	Posttest	.964	30	.388	Normal

Source: Data processed with SPSS, 2026.

Hypothesis Testing

Paired-samples t-tests rejected both null hypotheses of no pretest-posttest difference. For reading interest, $t(29) = -24.032$, $p < .001$, with a mean increase of 12.80 points (95% CI [11.71, 13.89]); the pretest-posttest correlation was $r = .890$ ($p < .001$), indicating that students' relative standing was fairly stable even as scores rose. For literacy skills, $t(29) = -13.548$, $p < .001$, with a mean increase of 16.67 points (95% CI [14.15, 19.18]); the pretest-posttest correlation was $r = .741$ ($p < .001$). H1 and H2 were therefore both supported, and because both outcomes moved in the same direction over the same intervention period, H3 was supported as well.

Table 3. Paired-Samples t-Test Results

Variable	Mean Pre	Mean Post	Post-Pre	SE	t	df	p	95% CI
Reading interest	51.03	63.83	12.80	0.53	-24.032	29	< .001	11.71-13.89
Literacy skills	57.83	74.50	16.67	1.23	-13.548	29	< .001	14.15-19.18

Source: Data processed with SPSS, 2026.



Normalized Gain and Effect Size

N-gain was .442 for reading interest and .395 for literacy skills, both moderate. Individually, 3 students registered a low N-gain for reading interest (26 moderate, 1 high) and 9 a low N-gain for literacy skills (20 moderate, 1 high), underscoring that class-average improvement does not imply uniform individual progress. Effect sizes were large for both outcomes ($r = .976$ and $.929$), though these should be read alongside the design's limitations: no control group, the same instrument at both time points, and possible assessment-awareness effects.

Table 4. Summary of N-Gain and Effect Size

Variable	N-Gain	Category	Effect Size r	Interpretation
Reading interest	0.442	Moderate	0.976	Large
Literacy skills	0.395	Moderate	0.929	Large

Source: Data processed, 2026.

DISCUSSION

The reading interest results answer the study's first question: reading corner utilization was followed by a significant, consistent rise in reading interest across the full cohort. That the largest indicator gain occurred in the desire to seek or borrow books, rather than enjoyment alone, suggests a shift from passive liking toward active approach behavior, consistent with a reading corner working primarily by lowering the practical cost of starting to read (Wulandari et al., 2023). This local pattern matches prior Indonesian findings linking reading-corner access to reading interest gains (Faisal & Hadi, 2018; Sari & Puspita, 2021; Sulaiman & Iskandar, 2019), while echoing the broader point that reading time or material alone is not sufficient -- book choice, teacher support, and well-matched difficulty also shape whether access converts into engagement (Kurniawan & Hidayah, 2021; Megawati & Wulandari, 2017).

The literacy skills results answer the second question: literacy skills also rose significantly, though with wider variation in individual gains. Two mechanisms plausibly explain this. First, more opportunity to practice: as word recognition becomes more automatic, more cognitive capacity becomes available for comprehension (Rahim, 2008). Second, active processing: text-based questioning, main-idea identification, and retelling require students to select, connect, and reorganize textual information, consistent with the largest gain on answering text-based



questions (+0.93) and the smallest on retelling (+0.47) -- arguably the most demanding sub-skill, since it requires reconstructing meaning in one's own words rather than simply locating it in the text (Nugroho, 2020).

Because reading interest and literacy skills moved together, the pattern is consistent with a reinforcing cycle in which access lowers the barrier to starting, interest sustains engagement, and practice builds skill, which strengthens interest in turn (Nugroho, 2020; Wulandari et al., 2023). An intervention aimed only at motivation, or only at skill drilling, is likely to leave half of this cycle unaddressed, whereas combining ready book access with structured comprehension follow-up engages both sides at once -- indicating that activating an existing classroom resource through routine and curation, rather than new infrastructure spending, can still move both dimensions of early literacy in remote schools.

Four limitations qualify these conclusions: the one-group design cannot rule out maturation or repeated-testing explanations; the sample was limited to one classroom at a single school; program fidelity was not systematically measured; and the literacy test relied on ordinary multiple-choice and short-response items, a format diagnostic-testing research cautions cannot fully separate genuine comprehension from guessing (Andariana et al., 2020). Future research using a quasi-experimental design with a control group, a larger school sample, and a more diagnostic test format would help establish how robust these gains are.

CONCLUSION

This study found that reading corner utilization was followed by a significant improvement in fifth-grade students' reading interest, from a mean of 51.03 to 63.83, $t(29) = -24.032$, $p < .001$, $N\text{-gain} = .442$ (moderate), $r = .976$ (large), and in their literacy skills, from a mean of 57.83 to 74.50, $t(29) = -13.548$, $p < .001$, $N\text{-gain} = .395$ (moderate), $r = .929$ (large). All 30 students improved on both outcomes. Because the study used a one-group design without a control group, these results should be read as evidence of reliable within-group change associated with the intervention period rather than a fully isolated causal claim. Taken together, the findings indicate that an accessible, well-managed, regularly rotated reading corner can meaningfully strengthen both the motivational and cognitive sides of early literacy, even in a resource-constrained school without a functioning library.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Schools are encouraged to establish the reading corner as a standing component of classroom literacy practice, with a managed collection, a regular rotation schedule, and periodic monitoring. Teachers are encouraged to sustain a consistent daily reading routine, give students genuine choice over reading material, and facilitate text-based questioning and retelling, matching text difficulty to student ability. Students are encouraged to use the reading corner independently, while parents can reinforce the habit through home reading time and conversation about books. Future researchers are encouraged to adopt a quasi-experimental design with a control group, a larger and more varied set of schools, and a more diagnostic literacy test format -- such as the three-tier diagnostic test used in biology-misconception research (Andariana et al., 2020) -- that pairs each item with a confidence rating to better distinguish genuine comprehension from guessing.

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