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STRENGTHENING LITERACY CULTURE AND DEEP LEARNING THROUGH READING CORNER OPTIMIZATION: A COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAM AT UPT SDN 6 MENGKENDEK

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Abstract

The use of reading corners in primary schools is generally limited to providing reading facilities and has not been optimally integrated into the learning process. This condition was also identified at UPT SDN 6 Mengkendek, Tana Toraja Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. This community service program aimed to optimize the use of reading corners as a strategy to strengthen literacy culture while supporting the implementation of deep learning. The program was carried out over three months using a participatory approach involving the principal, teachers, and students. The activities included needs assessment, program planning, reading corner optimization, implementation assistance, and monitoring and evaluation. Program evaluation was conducted through observations, interviews, and documentation. The findings indicated that optimizing the reading corners increased students' engagement in literacy and learning activities. A total of 63% of students consistently and 22% frequently used the reading corners for reading, seeking additional information, participating in discussions, using books as learning resources, and engaging in independent learning. Teachers also reported improvements in students' literacy culture, critical thinking skills, and learning independence. In addition to supporting classroom instruction, the reading corners became a literacy space where students read and discussed books during break times. Overall, the program demonstrates that optimizing reading corners can strengthen literacy culture while fostering a more active, independent, and meaningful learning environment through their integration as learning resources in deep learning.

Keywords: Community service; Deep learning; Literacy culture; Reading corner.

INTRODUCTION

Deep learning has emerged as a key paradigm in educational transformation, emphasizing meaningful learning through students' active engagement in knowledge construction, critical thinking, problem-solving, collaboration, and reflection on learning experiences (Akbar et al., 2025; Allolinggi & Maminiaina, 2025). This approach shifts learning beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge toward a deeper understanding of concepts and their application in diverse real-life contexts (Allolinggi et al., 2025). Consequently, the successful implementation of deep learning requires a learning environment that provides diverse learning resources, encourages information exploration, and promotes both independent and collaborative learning (Allolinggi et al., 2024).

A strong literacy culture serves as a fundamental foundation for the implementation of deep learning. Literacy is no longer viewed merely as the ability to read and write but also as the capacity to access, understand, evaluate, and critically use information to construct new knowledge (Herawati et al., 2023). Students with well-developed literacy habits tend to demonstrate greater curiosity, integrate information from multiple sources, and participate more actively in the learning process (Kumalaisyawati, 2025). Therefore, strengthening literacy culture is essential for fostering student-centered learning and developing twenty-first-century competencies (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

One strategy to strengthen literacy culture is the effective use of reading corners as part of the school learning environment. Beyond serving as spaces that provide reading materials, reading corners can become learning spaces that encourage independent reading, information seeking, discussion, idea generation, and the integration of acquired knowledge with classroom learning (Allolinggi et al., 2024). When effectively utilized, reading corners can support the core characteristics of deep learning by promoting exploration, reflection, communication, and knowledge construction (Syafi'i & Darnaningsih, 2025).

Previous studies have shown that reading corners contribute to improving students' reading interest, reading frequency, and literacy habits in primary schools (Salido et al., 2025). Other studies have also reported that supportive literacy environments enhance students' critical thinking skills and learning engagement (Annisa, 2025). However, most previous studies and community service programs have primarily focused on reading corners as literacy facilities or tools for promoting reading interest. Limited attention has been given to systematically integrating reading corners into deep learning to foster critical thinking, independent learning, information exploration, and reflective learning (Andriyani, 2024). This gap highlights the need to develop a model that positions reading corners not only as literacy facilities but also as learning resources that promote meaningful learning.

Observations and discussions with the principal and teachers at UPT SDN 6 Mengkendek revealed that reading corners had already been established and were regularly used for school literacy activities. Nevertheless, their potential as integrated learning resources had not been fully realized. Their use remained largely limited to reading activities, while their integration into information exploration, discussion, reflection, and independent learning within deep learning practices was still limited. These findings indicate the need to provide teachers with assistance in integrating reading corners into instructional practices so that they function not only as literacy facilities but also as effective learning strategies that enhance students' learning experiences.

In response to these needs, the community service team implemented a reading corner optimization program through the improvement of literacy spaces, enrichment of reading collections, provision of supporting learning media, and teacher mentoring on integrating reading corners into classroom instruction. Unlike conventional community service programs that mainly focus on improving facilities or increasing reading interest, this program positioned reading corners as instructional resources supporting information exploration, discussion, reference-based learning, reflection, and independent learning. This approach is expected to strengthen literacy culture while supporting the implementation of deep learning by creating more active, contextual, and meaningful learning experiences.

This community service program aimed to optimize the function of reading corners as a strategy for strengthening literacy culture and supporting deep learning at UPT SDN 6 Mengkendek. In addition to benefiting the partner school, the program is expected to generate a best practice model for integrating reading corners into classroom learning that can be adapted by other primary schools to develop more literate, participatory, and meaningful learning environments.

METHOD

This community service program was conducted by a team of lecturers and undergraduate students from the Primary School Teacher Education Study Program, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, at UPT SDN 6 Mengkendek, Tana Toraja Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The program was implemented over three months and involved the principal, teachers, and students as active partners in optimizing the use of reading corners to support deep learning and strengthen literacy culture.

The program adopted a participatory approach, positioning the school as an active partner throughout all stages of implementation. Through this approach, the school was not merely a beneficiary but was actively involved in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation processes to ensure that the activities addressed the school's needs and could be sustained beyond the program period.

The program was implemented through five stages: needs assessment, program planning, reading corner optimization, implementation assistance, and monitoring and evaluation. The needs assessment was conducted through observations, interviews, and discussions with the principal and teachers to identify the existing literacy culture, the needs for reading corner development, and strategies for integrating reading corners into classroom learning. The findings served as the basis for designing activities tailored to the needs of the partner school.

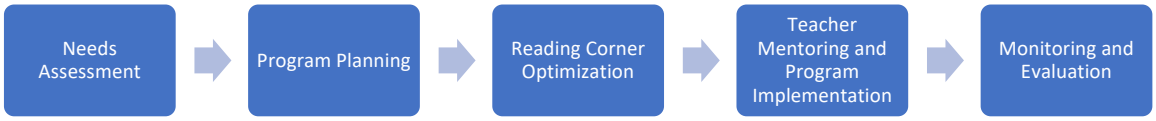

Figure 1: Community Service Program Implementation Procedure

The planning stage involved designing the reading corners, identifying the required facilities and learning resources, selecting reading materials appropriate to students' characteristics, and designing literacy activities integrated into classroom instruction. The optimization stage included reorganizing the reading corner, improving the arrangement of reading materials, providing literacy-supporting media, and creating a comfortable learning environment that encouraged students to read.

The implementation assistance stage focused on strengthening teachers' capacity to integrate reading corners into classroom instruction. Teachers received mentoring in designing and implementing reading, discussion, information-seeking, and reflective learning activities using the available reading materials. This assistance aimed to transform reading corners from literacy facilities into learning resources that support deep learning.

Monitoring and evaluation were conducted to assess both the implementation of the program and its impact on students' literacy activities. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation. Interviews with the principal and teachers explored changes in the utilization of reading corners and their contribution to the learning process, while documentation was used to record the implementation of all program activities.

Student engagement was assessed using the Student Reading Corner Utilization Observation Instrument, which consisted of nine indicators: independently visiting the reading corner, reading books, using the reading corner during break time, discussing reading materials, seeking additional information from books, connecting reading materials with classroom lessons, expressing opinions after reading, using books as references for assignments, and engaging in independent learning through the reading corner. Each indicator was rated on a four-point scale: never (1), sometimes (2), often (3), and always (4). The observation results were used to describe students' engagement in utilizing the reading corner throughout the program.

Table 1. Dimensions and Indicators of Program Evaluation

Dimension	Indicator
Literacy Culture	Independently visits the reading corner
	Reads books in the reading corner
	Uses the reading corner during break time
Deep Learning	Participates in discussions about reading materials
	Seeks additional information from books
	Connects reading materials with classroom lessons
	Expresses opinions after reading
	Uses books as references for assignments
	Engages in independent learning through the reading corner

All data were analyzed descriptively. Observation data were used to identify patterns of students' engagement in utilizing the reading corner, whereas interview and documentation data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis results were used to evaluate the implementation of the program and to identify the contribution of reading corner optimization to strengthening literacy culture and supporting the implementation of deep learning at UPT SDN 6 Mengkendek.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reluts

This The reading corner optimization program had a positive impact on strengthening literacy culture at UPT SDN 6 Mengkendek. Based on interviews with teachers and students, the improved reading corners encouraged greater engagement in literacy activities throughout the school. Teachers reported that students increasingly used their free time to visit the reading corners, either to read books or discuss reading materials with their peers. These findings indicate that the reading corners evolved beyond simple book storage areas into active and attractive learning spaces for students.

The increased utilization of the reading corners also contributed to the implementation of deep learning. Teachers noted that the availability of diverse reading materials provided additional learning resources that could be integrated into classroom instruction. Rather than relying solely on textbooks, students became accustomed to seeking information from multiple sources to enrich their understanding of the subject matter. This practice promoted greater learning independence, encouraged information exploration, and fostered critical thinking through reading and discussion activities.

In addition to supporting independent learning, the reading corners strengthened interactions among students. Classroom observations revealed that students frequently used the reading corners to discuss both reading materials and lesson content. These activities created a collaborative learning environment in which students exchanged ideas, shared opinions, and constructed knowledge together. Such practices reflect the key characteristics of deep learning, which emphasizes students' active engagement in knowledge construction through exploration, communication, and reflection.

Figure 2: (a) Community service activities with students; (b) Community service team with the principal and teachers.

Another notable finding was the transformation of the reading corners into comfortable learning spaces beyond regular classroom hours. During break times, many students chose to spend their time in the reading corners reading books or discussing their readings with classmates. This phenomenon indicates that literacy culture has gradually become part of students' daily routines within the school environment. The reading corners are no longer viewed merely as supplementary facilities but have become attractive spaces where students learn, interact, and spend their free time productively.

Figure 3: Students reading in the reading corner

The community service program demonstrated that optimizing reading corners not only increased the utilization of school literacy facilities but also supported the implementation of deep learning by promoting reading activities, independent learning, collaborative discussions, and the effective use of diverse learning resources. These outcomes contributed to strengthening the school's literacy culture by fostering positive habits of reading and independent learning, both during classroom instruction and beyond school hours.

The observation results indicate that the reading corner optimization program had a positive impact on students' literacy activities and the implementation of deep learning at UPT SDN 6 Mengkendek. Overall, most students were classified in the always and often categories across all observed indicators, suggesting that the reading corners were actively utilized as both learning resources and literacy spaces.

Regarding literacy culture, reading books in the reading corner recorded the highest percentage in the always category (68%), followed by independently visiting the reading corner (63%) and using the reading corner during break time (62%). These findings suggest that the reading corners have become an integral part of students' daily learning habits, extending beyond classroom instruction to their leisure time. The high frequency of visits and reading

activities demonstrates that the reading corners provide a supportive learning environment while fostering a strong reading culture within the school.

Table 2. Students' Activities in Utilizing the Reading Corner

Indicator	Never (1)	Sometimes (2)	Often (3)	Always (4)
Independently visits the reading corner	0%	12%	25%	63%
Reads books in the reading corner	0%	10%	22%	68%
Uses the reading corner during break time	0%	18%	20%	62%
Discusses reading materials	0%	16%	24%	60%
Seeks additional information from books	0%	15%	22%	63%
Connects reading materials with classroom lessons	0%	17%	21%	62%
Expresses opinions after reading	1%	17%	22%	60%
Uses books as references for assignments	6%	12%	22%	60%
Engages in independent learning through the reading corner	5%	15%	20%	60%

In terms of deep learning, most students also demonstrated high levels of engagement in utilizing the reading corners. A total of 63% of students consistently sought additional information from books, while 62% regularly connected reading materials with classroom lessons. Furthermore, 60% consistently discussed reading materials, expressed their opinions after reading, used books as references for assignments, and engaged in independent learning through the reading corners. These findings indicate that the reading corners served not only as spaces for reading but also as learning environments that supported knowledge construction through information exploration, discussion, reflection, and the application of information in learning activities.

Nevertheless, a small proportion of students had not yet fully utilized the reading corners. Approximately 6% of students never used books as references for assignments, while 5% never engaged in independent learning through the reading corners. Field observations suggest that these behaviors were influenced by students' preference for relying on textbooks or teacher explanations when completing assignments, as well as their tendency to favor group learning over independent study. In addition, about 1% of students had never expressed their opinions after reading, indicating that some students still require guidance to develop greater confidence in communicating their ideas and understanding.

The observation findings demonstrate that the reading corner optimization program successfully enhanced the utilization of reading corners as literacy spaces and learning resources that support deep learning. The consistently high percentages in the always and often categories across nearly all indicators indicate that students have developed positive habits of reading, utilizing multiple sources of information, engaging in discussions, connecting reading materials with classroom learning, and learning independently. These findings corroborate the interview results, in which teachers reported that the reading corners had made a meaningful contribution to strengthening the school's literacy culture and improving the overall quality of the learning process.

Discussion

The findings of this community service program demonstrate that optimizing reading corners had a positive impact on strengthening literacy culture at UPT SDN 6 Mengkendek. The high percentages of students who independently visited the reading corners, read books, and utilized the reading corners during break time indicate that these facilities have become an integral part of students' learning habits. These findings support literacy culture theory, which suggests that learning environments enriched with reading resources can foster sustainable reading habits through continuous exposure and practice (Apriyani & Elizar, 2024). From the perspective of learning environment theory, accessible, comfortable, and engaging learning spaces can enhance students' motivation and participation in academic activities (Wahidin & Romli, 2020).

These findings are also consistent with previous studies reporting that reading corners increase students' reading interest and reading frequency in primary schools (Nadia Nur Hanifah et al., 2026). However, most previous studies have viewed reading corners primarily as facilities supporting school literacy programs aimed at promoting reading habits. In contrast, the present community service program demonstrates that reading corners can be

developed as learning environments that support deep learning through the integration of diverse reading resources into classroom instruction. The observation results further revealed that most students used the reading corners to seek additional information, connect reading materials with classroom lessons, use books as references for assignments, and engage in independent learning. These activities indicate that reading corners not only enhance reading skills but also facilitate knowledge construction. This finding is consistent with constructivist theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is actively constructed through learners' interactions with learning resources, experiences, and their learning environment (Muntazah et al., 2025). In this context, reading corners function as learning spaces that expand students' opportunities to develop understanding independently rather than relying solely on teacher instruction.

The utilization of reading corners also supports the implementation of deep learning. According to the concept of deep learning, students should be encouraged to develop a comprehensive understanding of concepts, connect new knowledge with prior knowledge, think critically, and apply their understanding in various contexts (Djulian Albar Artono et al., 2025). The high percentages of students who connected reading materials with classroom lessons, searched for additional information, and used books as learning references indicate that reading corners have become valuable learning resources supporting these characteristics. Therefore, the findings suggest that successful implementation of deep learning depends not only on teachers' instructional strategies but also on the availability of resource-rich learning environments.

These findings also reinforce previous research showing that supportive literacy environments contribute to the development of critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and independent learning (Wihaya Kusumah et al., 2023). Unlike previous studies that mainly focused on the relationship between literacy culture and reading ability, this community service program demonstrates that optimizing reading corners also strengthens essential dimensions of deep learning, including information exploration, discussion, reflection, and independent learning. In other words, reading corners have evolved beyond reading facilities into learning spaces that actively promote knowledge construction.

Nevertheless, the observation results indicate that a small proportion of students had not yet utilized the reading corners optimally, particularly for using books as assignment references and engaging in independent learning. These findings suggest that changes in learning behavior require continuous reinforcement. According to learning behavior theory, habit formation is influenced by the interaction between the learning environment, individual motivation, and support from teachers and peers (Apriyani & Elizar, 2024). Therefore, providing reading corners should be accompanied by instructional strategies that consistently integrate literacy activities into classroom learning so that all students have equal opportunities to benefit from these facilities.

Overall, this community service program extends previous findings by demonstrating that optimizing reading corners not only strengthens literacy culture but also represents an effective strategy for supporting the implementation of deep learning in primary schools. The program's primary contribution lies in integrating literacy-rich learning environments, teacher mentoring, and the effective use of reading corners as learning resources that encourage active student engagement. This model has the potential to serve as a best practice that can be adapted by other primary schools according to their specific contexts and needs.

Future initiatives should further develop reading corners by expanding the diversity of reading materials, strengthening teachers' capacity to integrate literacy into classroom instruction, and incorporating digital technologies as complementary learning resources. Future research and community service programs may also explore digital reading corners, integrate QR codes that provide access to online learning resources, or combine reading corners with project-based learning to examine their broader impact on students' critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and independent learning (Akbar & Haidar, 2019; Apriyani & Elizar, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The community service program demonstrated that optimizing reading corners effectively strengthened literacy culture while supporting the implementation of deep learning at UPT SDN 6 Mengkendek. The program increased students' engagement in reading, information exploration, discussion, and independent learning, indicating that reading corners functioned not only as literacy facilities but also as learning resources that enriched the instructional process. Teacher mentoring also contributed to the integration of reading corner activities into classroom learning, creating more active, meaningful, and student-centered learning experiences. These findings suggest that optimizing reading corners can serve as a practical strategy for fostering literacy culture and promoting deep learning in primary schools. Future community service initiatives should focus on expanding reading collections,

strengthening teachers' capacity to integrate literacy into instruction, and incorporating digital learning resources to enhance the sustainability and broader impact of the program.

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