

STRENGTHENING THE CHARACTER OF READING THROUGH THE USE OF READING CORNER IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

Ratnaningsih^{1a}, Wakhudin^{2b*}, Subuh Anggoro^{3c}, Ine Kusuma Aryani^{4d}

^{1,2,3,4}Program Studi Magister Pendidikan Dasar, Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto

^a ratnaningriswanto@gmail.com

^b wakhudin@ump.ac.id

^c subuhanggoro@ump.ac.id

^d inepascapendas@gmail.com

(*) Corresponding Author

wakhudin@ump.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

Character education in elementary schools is important but requires effective strategies to foster sustainable reading habits. This study aims to analyze the strengthening of reading habit character through the use of reading corners in elementary schools. This type of research is qualitative with a case study method. The study was conducted at SDN Patimuan 01 Cilacap with subjects of 4 teachers, 6 students in grades IV–VI, and 1 principal. Data were collected using observation, interviews, and documentary studies. Data were analyzed interactively with the stages of data condensation, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data were checked for validity through triangulation of sources and techniques. The findings reveal that the reading corner, when managed in a structured and contextual manner, effectively strengthens students' reading habit character. This is reflected in the development of five key aspects: discipline through routine reading practices, curiosity through active engagement with reading materials, critical thinking through reflection and creative tasks, independence in selecting and responding to texts, and responsibility in maintaining reading resources. These findings indicate that reading corners function not only as literacy facilities but also as strategic environments for cultivating sustainable reading habits. Support from schools, families, and the broader social environment is essential to build a consistent and holistic literacy ecosystem.

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INTRODUCTIONS

Character education plays a role in shaping students' personalities, attitudes, and positive habits, one of which is through developing a reading habit character. In the context of basic education, the habit of reading literacy is a fundamental need to shape creative, intelligent, and character-based students (Febriandari, 2019; Wakhudin, 2020). In the 21st-century context, literacy develops not only as basic reading skills but also includes digital literacy, critical reasoning, creativity, communication, and collaboration (Sari, 2018; Muhammad et al., 2020; Musbikin, 2021; Dewi,

2022; Masruroh & Ramiati, 2022; Fitriyana et al., 2023; Hasanah, 2023). Therefore, strengthening reading habit character is the foundation for developing adaptive and sustainable literacy skills in students.

Although literacy and reading interest are considered important, the reality is that students' reading interests in elementary schools vary. Many students read only when required as an assignment, while reading is rarely practiced as a habit or hobby (Suyatno, 2021; Purnama et al., 2022; Safitri et al., 2023; Rahmadhani & Dahlan, 2023). A limited collection of books that align with their interests, a lack of engaging literacy activities, and minimal teacher motivation and parental support are factors contributing to low reading interest. This situation indicates a gap between the importance of literacy and its actual implementation in schools (Purnama et al., 2022; Nazaruddin & Mariyah, 2023).

Based on observations at SDN Patimuan 01 Cilacap, reading corners are available, but the number of books is limited and the spatial arrangement is less attractive to students. Routine reading activities are only partially implemented through "reading hour" programs, but the frequency is still low. Teachers report that parental support also varies, so students' reading interest is strongly influenced by the home and school environments. This fact highlights the need for a more structured and sustainable strategy to strengthen reading interest. In response to the low reading interest, schools have begun developing reading corners as a strategic literacy medium.

Several studies have shown that well-managed reading corners, with varied book collections, comfortable layouts, and teacher-assisted activities can encourage students to read independently (Melda et al., 2022; Santi & Sueca, 2023; Khoirunnisa, 2024; Saputri & Rochmiyati, 2024). Furthermore, parental involvement in encouraging students to utilize reading corners also strengthens a love of reading and critical thinking skills. Reading corners are not just places to read but also a means of holistically shaping students' character (Nazaruddin & Mariyah, 2023; Hasanah, 2023; Afriatama & Sapri, 2023).

Although numerous studies have highlighted literacy and reading corners, most have focused on literacy programs or increasing reading interest in general and have not specifically examined how the use of reading corners contributes to the formation of reading habit character through measurable behavioral indicators. Furthermore, the relationship between literacy facilities, learning practices, and the internalization of character values has not been fully explained in the context of the use of reading corners in elementary schools.

Based on these conditions, this research is novel in its focus on strengthening the character of reading habits through the use of reading corners in elementary schools, emphasizing the behavioral indicators of literacy as a manifestation of character according to Muhammad et al. (2020) namely discipline, curiosity, critical reasoning, independence, and responsibility. Using a qualitative approach, this study describes in a simpler and more contextual way how students utilize reading corners in their daily activities, thus demonstrating the process of developing reading habits that gradually and concretely shape reading habits in elementary schools.

The research problem is formulated as follows: *"How can a love of reading be strengthened through reading corners in elementary schools?"* The purpose of this study is to analyze the strengthening of a love of reading through reading corners in elementary schools. This research is expected to provide practical benefits for teachers and schools in designing structured and engaging literacy strategies, as well as provide guidance for parents to support the development of a love of reading at home, thereby creating a holistic and sustainable literacy ecosystem for students.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a descriptive qualitative method with a case study design. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the meaning, processes, and social context underlying literacy practices and character development in a natural and holistic manner in elementary schools. This aligns with Creswell (2019) view that qualitative research focuses on understanding individual experiences of social phenomena within their natural context. Aryani (2021) explains that case studies are a research strategy for examining contemporary phenomena in a real-life context in depth and comprehensively. The case study design was used because this research focuses on a specific case, namely the use of reading corners, which are analyzed in depth within specific spatial and temporal boundaries to strengthen the reading character of elementary school students.

The research was conducted from January to March 2026 at SDN Patimuan 01, Cilacap. This location was chosen because the school has an active reading corner and exhibits variations in student reading interests relevant to

the analysis of strengthening reading habits through literacy behavior. Subjects were selected through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the use of the reading corner and literacy practices at school.

Table 1. Research Subjects and Criteria

Code	Role	Number	Reason for Selection
G1–G4	Teachers	4	Literacy facilitators who encourage students to use the reading corner and support the development of reading habit character.
S1–S6	Students	6	2 fourth-grade students, 2 fifth-grade students, and 2 sixth-grade students who regularly use the reading corner so that their literacy behaviors can be observed.
KS	Principal	1	Policy maker responsible for planning and managing the reading corner as well as the school literacy program.

Data collection techniques included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation studies. Observations were used to directly observe student interactions with the reading corner, their reading habits, and emerging literacy initiatives. Interviews were conducted with teachers, students, and the principal to explore perceptions, experiences, and strategies for strengthening reading habits through the reading corner. Examples of questions included the following: to teachers, "How do you encourage students to use the reading corner regularly?"; to students, "How does the reading corner help you read and learn independently?"; and to the principal, "How does the school support the development of reading habits through the reading corner?" Documentation studies included literacy activity notes, reading corner photographs, book collection lists, and activity reports to strengthen the findings.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2019), which consists of data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the condensation stage, data from observations, interviews, and documentation were selected, focused, and simplified according to the research objectives, eliminating irrelevant data. Furthermore, the data were presented narratively and thematically to clarify the interrelationships between findings and then classified based on the reading character indicators according to Muhammad et al. (2020), namely discipline, curiosity, critical reasoning, independence, and responsibility. The final stage involved drawing conclusions through repeated verification and confirmation with the research subjects to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the findings.

Data were validated through source triangulation and technical triangulation, as stated by Sidiq & Choiri (2019), who noted that triangulation is an important strategy in qualitative research to increase data credibility by checking the consistency of findings through various sources and data collection techniques. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing and confirming information obtained from various informants, namely teachers, students, and principals, so that a comprehensive and consistent understanding was obtained. Technical triangulation was carried out by combining various data collection methods, including observation, interviews, and documentation, to test the suitability of data from different perspectives. Through this procedure, the resulting data became more credible, in-depth, and able to authentically represent how the use of reading corners contributed to strengthening students' reading habits in a sustainable manner.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

The results of this study are compiled from three primary sources: observations, interviews, and documentation studies, conducted in an integrated manner to gain a deeper understanding of strengthening the reading habit in elementary school students. The five indicators of reading habits used as the analytical framework are discipline, curiosity, critical thinking, independence, and responsibility. Each data source plays a crucial role in strengthening the validity of the findings and providing a comprehensive picture of literacy practices occurring in schools. The following presents the results of observations and documentation studies, which concretely illustrate how students utilize reading corners and how teachers support literacy activities to strengthen reading habits.

Table 2. Results of Observations and Documentation Studies on Strengthening Reading Habits Through

Reading Corners in Elementary Schools (Critical Analysis)

Reading Habit Character Indicators	Observation (Student / Teacher Codes)	Documentation	Meaning of Findings
Discipline	S1, S2 regularly read illustrated storybooks; S3, S4 read non-fiction books related to lesson themes; S5, S6 follow scheduled reading time; teachers G1–G4 monitor and assist	Literacy activity records, photos of students reading, list of borrowed books	The habituation of regular reading and teacher guidance fosters literacy discipline, enabling students to manage their reading time and take responsibility for their literacy schedule.
Curiosity	S1, S3, S5 ask questions about book content; S2, S4, S6 select books based on their interests; teacher G1 provides additional book recommendations, G2–G4 offer motivational support	Literacy question journals, students' favorite book lists	Exploration of diverse book collections and teacher guidance stimulates curiosity, encourages active learning, and enhances intrinsic reading motivation.
Critical Thinking	All students (S1–S6) create reading summaries or creative projects; teachers G1–G4 guide reflection and discussion	Reading summaries, literacy posters, creative projects	The application of reading into real activities develops analytical, reasoning, and evaluative skills, thereby strengthening students' critical thinking character.
Independence	S1, S2, S4, S6 borrow books independently and write reviews; S3, S5 recommend books to peers; teachers G2, G3 provide appreciation	Student literacy reviews, book recommendation lists, photos of borrowing activities	Opportunities to choose books and write reviews enhance literacy independence, enabling students to manage their reading activities autonomously.
Responsibility	All students (S1–S6) return books on time and maintain the cleanliness of the reading corner; teachers G1–G4 emphasize rules	Photos of a well-organized reading corner, book borrowing records	Compliance with rules and respect for books foster integrity and responsibility in students' literacy behavior.

The observation and documentation results in Table 2 show that students demonstrate consistent literacy patterns, ranging from reading discipline, curiosity, critical reasoning skills, independence, and responsibility in utilizing the reading corner. These practices are evident not only in daily activities but also in students' interactions with books and peers. These findings were further reinforced through interviews with teachers, students, and the principal, which confirmed that the implemented literacy strategies were positively received by students, supported by school policies, and able to foster a love of reading across the board.

Table 3. Interview Results with Teachers, Students, and the Principal Regarding Strengthening the Love of Reading Through the Reading Corner

Reading Habit Character Indicators	Teacher Perspective	Student Perspective	Principal Perspective	Meaning of Findings
Discipline	Establish reading schedules, monitor students'	Accustomed to reading daily according to the	Supports daily literacy schedules and	Discipline emerges when students consistently engage in scheduled reading activities,

	consistency, and assist in the reading corner	schedule and utilizing the reading corner	reading corner programs	supported by teacher guidance that ensures regular implementation
Curiosity	Provide book recommendations based on students' interests, encourage critical questioning about readings, and present digital literacy content	Motivated to read new books and explore reading content more critically	Provides diverse book collections and supports digital literacy programs	Curiosity develops when students are encouraged to explore reading materials, supported by teachers through book recommendations, reflective questioning, and engaging book collections
Critical Thinking	Guide the creation of reading summaries, creative projects, classroom discussions, and reflections	Understand reading content and create posters or creative projects based on what they read	Supports creative literacy activities and reading reflection	Critical thinking develops when students comprehend reading materials, engage in reflection, and apply their understanding through projects or creative works, thereby enhancing their analytical and evaluative skills
Independence	Provide opportunities for students to choose books independently, write reviews, and recommend books to peers	Students independently select books, write reviews, and share reading recommendations	Supports students' literacy independence through an open reading corner	Independence emerges when students take initiative in selecting books, writing reviews, and recommending readings to peers, enabling them to manage literacy activities autonomously
Responsibility	Emphasize timely book returns, maintaining the neatness of the reading corner, and respecting others' books	Return books on time and maintain the cleanliness of the reading corner	Provides guidance and supervision related to literacy	Responsibility is formed when students demonstrate positive literacy behaviors, such as returning books on time and organizing the reading corner, fostering respect for books and established rules

The interview findings confirm that the school systematically and consistently supports teachers' efforts to cultivate a love of reading in students. Both teachers and students demonstrated a shared understanding of the importance of habituation, motivation, role modeling, reflection, and digital literacy support as part of strengthening a love of reading. This allows literacy values to be internalized in students' actual behavior at school and through digital literacy activities. This allows reading habits to be developed not only within the classroom but also flexibly and sustainably.

Analysis of findings from observations, documentation, and interviews indicates that the combination of habituation, mentoring, reflection, and school environmental support fosters character traits such as discipline, curiosity, critical thinking, independence, and responsibility.

Discipline

Reading discipline is fostered through routine habits integrated with teacher role models, both through daily

reading hours in class and activities in the reading corner. Teachers monitor students' reading habits, facilitate independent book borrowing, and ensure consistent literacy schedules. This strategy is implemented because disciplined reading habits build a strong literacy foundation and enrich the learning experience, whether through printed books or digital media, making reading more relevant and enjoyable. One student stated, *"I regularly read storybooks every morning, and the teacher always asks what book I chose today"* (interview S2, February 27, 2026).

Teachers emphasized their active role in guiding students so that reading discipline becomes a daily habit: *"I always monitor students' reading activities and provide guidance if anyone is not following the schedule so that literacy discipline is formed consistently"* (interview G2, 28/02/2026). The principal also emphasized the institution's support for the reading corner program and daily literacy schedule, stating, *"The school supports the reading corner program and daily literacy schedule so that reading habits are ingrained in all students"* (Interview KS, 28/02/2026). Teacher guidance and a regular schedule help students build regularity, responsibility, and a commitment to literacy on an ongoing basis so that reading discipline becomes not only a formal activity but also part of everyday behavior.

Curiosity

Students' curiosity is stimulated through active exploration of reading material, where teachers recommend books based on their interests, encourage reflective questions, and provide a varied and engaging reading selection. This strategy encourages students to read beyond passive reading, seeking additional information, thinking critically, and understanding the reading material in depth, thereby increasing their intrinsic reading interest and cognitive engagement. One student stated, *"The teacher gave me a list of interesting books, and I became curious to read them all"* (interview S4, 27/02/2026), demonstrating that teacher guidance can foster curiosity and strong learning motivation.

Teachers also facilitate discussions about books, provide additional recommendations, and utilize digital media to present engaging literacy content. One teacher explained, *"We always encourage students to choose books based on their interests and encourage them to ask questions about the content, which increases their intrinsic motivation"* (interview G2, 28/02/2026). This approach helps students explore reading material more broadly and critically, while simultaneously fostering sustainable independent learning habits.

Critical Reasoning

Students' critical reasoning develops when they understand the content of readings, reflect on them, and apply that understanding to projects or creative works. This strategy is implemented because critical reasoning skills are necessary for interpreting information, expressing ideas, and deeply appreciating readings. One student stated, *"I made a poster about the story I read and told it to my classmates"* (interview S5, 28/02/2026), illustrating the students' active involvement in understanding and expressing the content of the readings.

Teachers guide students in creating summaries, literacy posters, or creative projects based on the selected readings, making the reading process interactive and reflective. The teacher explained, *"Reflection and creative projects enable students to understand reading more critically and enjoyably"* (interview G3, 28/02/2026). Teacher guidance helps students not only become accustomed to reading but also to interpreting and applying the reading content in real-life activities, gradually improving their analytical and evaluation skills.

Independence

Students' literacy independence is developed through opportunities to choose their own books, write reviews, and recommend reading materials to peers. This strategy provides space for students to manage their literacy activities independently and develop their creativity and reading interests according to their preferences. One student stated, *"I like borrowing books myself and writing reviews in my literacy notebook because I can express my opinions about the books I read"* (interview S1, 27/02/2026). This statement illustrates that students are beginning to take initiative in the learning process, learning to take responsibility for their reading choices, and enjoying independent literacy activities.

Teachers support literacy independence by appreciating student initiative, reviewing reviews, and providing comfortable reading corners. The teacher added, *"The school supports students' literacy independence through open reading corners and supporting facilities so students can learn to choose and explore reading materials independently"* (interview G4, 28/02/2026). This support strengthens students' motivation to take initiative, makes literacy a personal, routine activity, and also teaches them to manage their learning process independently.

Responsibility

Students' responsibility in literacy is formed through the habit of respecting books, obeying rules, and maintaining positive behavior in the reading corner. Teachers emphasize the importance of returning books on time, maintaining tidiness, and respecting their classmates' books as part of daily literacy practices. This process helps students realize that responsibility is not just about following rules, but also about respecting others and the learning environment. Responsibility develops through repeated practice and consistent teacher guidance. One student stated, *"I always return my books on time and keep the reading corner tidy so that other students can borrow them too"* (interview S3, 27/02/2026).

The teacher added, *"By practicing responsibility for books, students learn to respect literacy and their classmates, so this behavior becomes part of everyday classroom life"* (interview G1, 28/02/2026). This quote emphasizes that the internalization of the value of responsibility occurs through concrete practice, social interaction, and teacher reinforcement so that positive literacy traits become part of students' daily lives.

Discussion

The use of reading corners in elementary schools provides meaningful experiences for students in developing a love of reading. Discipline is reflected in regular reading habits and consistent teacher guidance, while curiosity arises when students are encouraged to explore interesting books with teacher guidance. Critical reasoning is developed through reflection and the application of reading comprehension in creative projects. Independence is seen when students take the initiative to choose reading materials and write their own reviews. Responsibility arises from adhering to reading corner rules, such as returning books on time and maintaining tidiness. These character traits do not emerge instantly but develop through consistent reading habits, active engagement with reading materials, and meaningful interactions with the literacy environment. This entire process demonstrates that reading corners are not simply literacy facilities but rather environments that naturally guide students to internalize character values in their daily lives. This aligns with the findings of Muhammad et al. (2020) that students' literacy behavior not only improves reading skills but also becomes a part of their daily lives, reflecting discipline, curiosity, critical reasoning, independence, and responsibility for literacy.

A literacy character is not formed instantly but rather through a consistent process of habituation in students' daily activities, such as regular reading, teacher mentoring, discussions, reflections, and creative literacy activities such as writing reviews and recommending reading materials. This finding aligns with Afriatama & Sapri (2023), Dewi (2022), and Suyatno (2021), who emphasized that an effective literacy movement needs to be supported by habituation, role models, and sustainability. However, the difference lies in this research approach, which focuses not only on the implementation of literacy programs but specifically links each strategy to indicators of character behavior, thus demonstrating a clearer relationship between literacy practices and the development of student character in a concrete and sustainable manner. Teachers act not only as facilitators but also as role models who actively demonstrate literacy behavior so that students learn through the concrete examples they observe. This process demonstrates that literacy character develops through the simultaneous stages of imitation, habituation, and internalization of values.

The strengthening of a love of reading in this study demonstrates a strong link with the systemic implementation of school literacy policies. This finding aligns with Anggraeni (2019) who emphasized that literacy success is determined not only by the program but also by consistent implementation, environmental support, and the involvement of the entire school community. However, this study differs in its emphasis on micro-practices in the classroom, namely how the policy is implemented in real life through student interactions with books, teachers, and peers. In this context, the reading corner functions as a practical space that connects the policy with students' actual activities, thus fostering disciplined and sustainable reading habits. Disciplined reading is evident in students' regular use of literacy time, adherence to schedules, and commitment to daily reading activities.

The results of this study are also relevant to the perspective of Musbikin (2021), who places curiosity at the heart of literacy character development, particularly in encouraging students' active involvement in reading through targeted stimulation. Similarities are evident in efforts to foster curiosity through pedagogical strategies such as book recommendations, reflective questions, and reading exploration so that reading interest develops not only

spontaneously but also in a structured manner. However, the difference lies in the focus of the study. While previous research primarily positioned curiosity as a theoretical concept, the current study examines it empirically as a behavioral indicator integrated with discipline, critical reasoning, independence, and responsibility in the real context of reading corner utilization, thus providing a more concrete, measurable, and applicable picture in learning practice.

Furthermore, this study is relevant to Fitriyana et al (2023) and Saputri & Rochmiyati (2024) who emphasized the role of teacher mentoring and creative literacy spaces in fostering student independence and responsibility. The difference is that this study emphasizes the integration of habituation, teacher role models, reading corner facilitation, and creative literacy to build a sustainable reading habit. This approach provides added value because it not only increases reading interest but also shapes comprehensive literacy behaviors, from reading discipline to positive attitudes toward literacy, so that reading habits become tangible and measurable in daily activities.

These findings also corroborate the research findings of Khoirunnisa (2024), which showed that the use of creative reading corners can improve students' critical thinking skills within the framework of the Pancasila Student Profile. Similarities are evident in the reflection activities and reading-based creative projects. The difference is that this study positions critical thinking as part of the character indicator of a love of reading, rather than as a standalone skill, thus providing the perspective that literacy and character are two integrated aspects. In this study, activities such as creating summaries, posters, and literacy projects demonstrate that reading has developed into a constructive process, rather than merely a receptive one. Students not only receive information but also process, interpret, and recommunicate the content of the reading. This indicates that the reading corner has the potential to become a higher-order literacy space that supports the development of contextual critical reasoning.

Furthermore, student involvement in selecting books, writing reviews, and recommending reading material indicates a shift from teacher-centered to student-centered literacy. These findings align with Nazaruddin & Mariyah (2023), who emphasize the importance of student autonomy in developing a love of reading. When students are given the space to determine their own literacy choices, they tend to be more responsible and emotionally engaged with reading activities. This reinforces the idea that literacy independence cannot be forced but needs to be facilitated through a supportive and flexible environment.

More broadly, the results of this study also support the views of Hasanah (2023) and Santi & Sueca (2023) regarding the importance of digital literacy in strengthening reading character. Its relevance is evident in the support of digital media in enriching students' reading experiences. However, this study still emphasizes a balance between print and digital literacy, making reading discipline the primary foundation for students' ability to utilize various literacy resources wisely and responsibly.

Overall, this study confirms the importance of habituation, role modeling, and active interaction in developing literacy character, as found in previous research. It also presents a new contribution by emphasizing indicators of literacy behavior as a manifestation of reading habits. The novelty of this research lies in strengthening reading habits through reading corners in elementary schools, emphasizing specific indicators of reading habits: discipline, curiosity, critical thinking, independence, and responsibility. Unlike previous research that focused more on literacy programs or increasing reading interest in general, this study emphasizes the concrete relationship between the literacy environment, student interactions with books, and measurable character development. Character-strengthening strategies are implemented through regular reading habits, teacher mentoring, discussions and reflections, and creative literacy activities such as writing reviews and sharing reading recommendations. This study not only examines the existence of reading corners as literacy facilities but also emphasizes how these facilities encourage concrete reading behavior and shape students' character sustainably. These findings demonstrate the important role of teacher role models, active interaction, and reading corner facilities in fostering disciplined, creative, independent, and responsible behavior, while also providing an adaptive and contextual model for developing character-based literacy education in elementary schools.

CONCLUSION

Utilizing a well-designed reading corner tailored to students' needs can strengthen reading habits. This is reflected in the development of five key aspects: discipline through reading habits, curiosity through exploring reading materials,

critical thinking skills through reflection and creative assignments, independence in selecting and responding to reading materials, and responsibility in adhering to rules and maintaining facilities. These findings indicate that the reading corner functions as a literacy space that supports the development of sustainable reading habits through active and directed student activities.

The implication is that strengthening a love of reading requires regular reading habits, teacher guidance, and the management of an attractive and comfortable reading corner. Teachers are advised to continue developing interactive and creative learning strategies through reading corners; schools need to provide comfortable reading spaces and a varied book collection; and parents are encouraged to support reading activities at home and monitor the use of digital literacy media. Collaboration between schools, parents, and the surrounding community needs to be strengthened so that reading habits can develop consistently and sustainably.

This research is limited to a single location and a limited number of subjects, so it does not fully represent the broader situation, particularly from the perspective of parents and the community. Therefore, further research is recommended to expand the scope of locations and subjects and combine quantitative approaches to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of utilizing reading corners.

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