The Effectiveness of the Reading Corner in the Independent Curriculum Program to Enhance Literacy Culture for Early Childhood at RA Islamic Mahardika

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
  	This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of the reading corner program in improving literacy culture among early childhood students at RA Islamic Mahardika under the Independent Curriculum framework. Literacy culture plays a crucial role in shaping children's reading and writing skills from an early age. The research employs a quasi-experimental method with a one-group pretest-posttest design involving 10 children as the sample. Data collection was conducted through observation and documentation of children's voluntary visits to the reading corner. Statistical analysis using SPSS version 26 includes the Shapiro-Wilk normality test, Paired Sample t-Test, and Cohen's d effect size measurement. The results indicate a significant increase in literacy culture after implementing the reading corner program, as demonstrated by the increase in children's reading, writing, and storytelling engagement. The Paired Sample t-Test yielded a p-value of 0.038 ($p < 0.05$), confirming a statistically significant improvement. Additionally, the effect size of 1.64 (Cohen's d) suggests a strong impact of the program. These findings highlight the importance of structured literacy interventions in early childhood

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education, reinforcing the necessity of integrating engaging literacy activities within the Independent Curriculum framework.

Introduction

Curriculum serves as the backbone of educational implementation. Without a well-structured curriculum, education cannot function effectively, efficiently, or as expected (Siregar et al., 2023). Therefore, every school is required to implement the Independent Curriculum. One such school, RA Islamic Mahardika, has adopted this curriculum by integrating a literacy-supporting program aimed at enhancing students' reading and writing abilities. The literacy learning process at RA Islamic Mahardika begins with designing classrooms equipped with an engaging and comfortable reading corner. The reading corner is intended to foster a culture of literacy among children, particularly in developing their reading and writing skills. It is stocked with books containing writing exercises, drawings, lines, numbers, and letters. Additionally, it offers illustrated flashcards that capture children's interest, encouraging them to visit and engage with the reading corner. There are also various illustrated storybooks, writing notebooks, and drawing books that children can freely use.

Early childhood literacy is closely linked to language development, as children must be able to comprehend and express language in relation to early literacy acquisition. Preparing children for literacy education from an early age is crucial because literacy skills help them solve problems and develop critical thinking and creativity. The

primary goal of literacy is to establish a strong foundation for early childhood education, ensuring that children are better prepared for formal reading instruction in the future. Given that literacy is a key competency required to navigate the complexities of information in the modern world, it is crucial to integrate literacy programs into every educational institution. Data indicates that Indonesia's literacy levels remain low, reinforcing the need for literacy-focused interventions in schools (Hamda et al., 2024).

According to Santika (in Parapat et al., 2023), Indonesia faces an urgent literacy crisis, ranking extremely low in international literacy assessments. Based on the 2018 PISA rankings by the OECD, Indonesia ranked 72nd out of 77 countries. Within the Southeast Asian context, only the Philippines ranked lower. Similarly, Suyadi (in Aulinda, 2020) cited a 2016 study by Central Connecticut State University (CCSU) in the World's Most Literate Nations Ranked report, which placed Indonesia at 60th out of 61 countries, far behind Malaysia and Singapore. Literacy is a fundamental skill that students must acquire from an early age, particularly during the critical developmental period from 0 to 6 years. This stage, often referred to as the 'golden age,' is characterized by rapid behavioral changes and cognitive growth.

At RA Islamic Mahardika, literacy levels remain low. Observations during preliminary research indicated that children often lost interest during storytelling sessions, were reluctant to read, and easily became bored when writing. By analyzing classroom behavior, it became

evident that literacy issues persisted, prompting the implementation of the reading corner program. In an effort to cultivate a literacy culture among young learners, RA Islamic Mahardika has adopted the Independent Curriculum with literacy as one of its key components. The school provides and designs engaging reading corners to enhance children's interest in literacy. Initially, teachers created visually appealing reading corners based on predetermined themes. Once established, they introduced children to the concept of the reading corner, explaining its purpose and when they were allowed to visit. All these activities were designed to encourage a culture of literacy. Each child's attendance and activities within the reading corner were recorded by teachers, who also served as observers and facilitators.

Previous studies have also examined the role of reading corners in literacy development. For instance, research by Parapat et al. (2023) highlighted the educational benefits of reading corners for community engagement. Their findings demonstrated that children who utilized reading corners developed better comprehension skills, particularly in summarizing stories from books. Furthermore, the expansion of reading corner initiatives—such as encouraging students to write summaries— significantly improved their writing abilities and overall literacy skills. A well-designed reading corner that is comfortable, creative, and visually appealing can effectively stimulate students' interest in reading.

Similarly, Saragih and Lubis (2023) found that community-based literacy initiatives, such as PoLi and RuPin, led to significant

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improvements in early childhood literacy development. Activities such as storytelling and photography-based storytelling further enhanced children's interest in reading and writing. Their findings support the argument that literacy should be introduced at an early age to ensure children develop a habit of reading and can apply their literacy skills in daily life.

Given these findings, this study seeks to address a gap in the literature by assessing the effectiveness of reading corners in fostering literacy culture among young learners. Early childhood represents a critical phase in human development, characterized by rapid physical and cognitive growth (Rozana et al., 2024). Implementing structured literacy interventions during this stage is essential for optimizing children's cognitive and linguistic development.

The reading corner initiative is not an isolated program but rather an extension of the Independent Curriculum. The Independent Curriculum is designed to optimize learning by providing varied instructional content and allowing students adequate time to explore knowledge concepts and strengthen their competencies (Kemdikbud, 2022). This curriculum aims to accelerate the achievement of national education goals by improving the quality of human resources in Indonesia. An essential aspect of this goal is fostering high-level reasoning skills, particularly in literacy and numeracy (Khoirurrijal et al., 2022).

Literacy is a fundamental skill that enables individuals to process

and analyze information effectively. Early childhood literacy refers to children's ability to read, write, and count, which they acquire at home and within their social environment. Literacy is a critical developmental task that must be stimulated from an early age. While literacy is often associated with basic reading and writing skills (Ni'matuthoyyibah et al., 2022), many parents mistakenly focus solely on ensuring their children can read and write at an early age, rather than fostering a deeper understanding of literacy as a lifelong skill.

To support literacy development in schools, reading corners serve as a crucial literacy initiative. A reading corner is a designated space within the classroom or school that is carefully arranged to be visually appealing and engaging for students. Typically, reading corners are located in classroom corners or separate rooms and are equipped with bookshelves, posters, and various reading and writing materials (Nurmala et al., 2024). Reading corners are an integral part of school literacy programs, as they provide students with a stimulating environment that nurtures their interest in reading. School literacy movements aim to reinforce activities such as reading corners and other literacy initiatives within educational settings (Ramayani & Fahrijal, 2022). These initiatives encourage children to develop creative thinking, problem-solving skills, collaboration, and effective communication.

Methods

This study employs a quasi-experimental method using a one-group pretest-posttest design. The research sample consists of 10

children, and the primary variable measured is the frequency of each child's voluntary visits to the reading corner outside of teacher instruction. These visits include times outside regular learning hours, such as before class begins, during recess, or after school while waiting to be picked up. The research process begins with designing an engaging reading corner within the classroom. Following this, an orientation is conducted to introduce young learners to the concept of the reading corner, its purpose, and when they are allowed to visit and engage with it. Once the orientation is complete, the researcher observes and records the frequency of student visits to the reading corner.

For data collection, the study utilizes documentation analysis, including visitor logs and literacy observations, focusing on early childhood literacy indicators such as curiosity, critical thinking skills, oral language development, reading ability, and writing skills. Based on the provided instruments and documentation of student visits, the collected data is then processed to calculate the daily visit percentage, allowing for an assessment of literacy culture improvement among early childhood students at RA Islamic Mahardika.

Additionally, this study employs SPSS version 26 for data analysis to ensure accuracy and standardization. The use of SPSS version 26 enables researchers to test data normality using the Shapiro-Wilk method and perform paired sample t-tests to assess the statistical significance of pretest and posttest differences. Furthermore, Cohen's d effect size is calculated to determine the extent to which the reading

corner program influences early childhood literacy development. Utilizing SPSS version 26 is crucial, as it facilitates the systematic processing of quantitative data, enhancing the validity and reliability of the analysis. The following instruments were employed in this study:

Table 1. Indicators of Reading Corner Achievement at RA Islamic Mahardika

No	Indicator	Score			
		BB	MB	BSH	BSB
1	Reading text				
2	Recognizing letter symbols				
3	Listening to storytelling				
4	Retelling stories				

Table 2. One-Group Pretest-Posttest Design

Pretest	Treatment	Posttest
T1	X	T2

Description:

- **T1**: Initial test (**Pretest**) conducted before implementing the reading corner.

- **X**: **Treatment**, where students engage with the reading corner.

- **T2**: Final test (**Posttest**) conducted after utilizing the reading corner.

To determine the effectiveness of the reading corner in promoting literacy culture, the **one-group pretest-posttest design** was applied with **two interventions and two posttests**. The study examined how students responded to literacy activities before and after exposure to the

reading corner program, measuring the impact of literacy-focused learning interventions.

Results and Discussions

The Reading Corner Program is an initiative implemented by RA Islamic Mahardika to enhance early childhood literacy interest. To support this, teachers have adopted a policy allowing young learners to visit or engage with the reading corner during recess or outside designated literacy hours. The reading corner is designed to provide a comfortable space equipped with a variety of books and writing materials, ensuring that children feel encouraged to participate in literacy activities.

The reading corner serves as a dedicated space offering engaging reading materials tailored to children's developmental stages. Initial observations at RA Islamic Mahardika indicate that the reading corner not only acts as a place for reading but also fosters social interaction, creativity, and exploration among children. It was observed that children who regularly accessed the reading corner showed a greater interest in books and literacy-related activities. They became more engaged in asking questions, participating in discussions, and retelling stories. Additionally, teacher involvement in facilitating activities within the reading corner contributed significantly to creating a positive learning environment, thereby enhancing language development and social skills—factors that played a crucial role in the program's success.

Based on the quasi-experimental research design, the study employed two test phases, namely the pretest (T1) and the posttest (T2), to assess literacy improvements.

1. Pretest

Table 3. Pretest Observation Results on Early Childhood Literacy at RA Islamic Mahardika

No	Indicator	Score			
		BB	MB	BSH	BSB
1	Reading text	6	8	6	-
2	Recognizing letter symbols	3	4	3	-
3	Listening to storytelling	8	6	6	-
4	Retelling stories	5	3	2	-

The pretest results indicate that early childhood literacy levels at RA Islamic Mahardika were relatively low, necessitating an effective intervention. The reading corner, as part of the Independent Curriculum program, was considered a viable treatment to improve literacy engagement among young learners. Consequently, teachers implemented the reading corner initiative, designing an engaging space with essential materials and decorations.

The reading corner was strategically positioned at the front-left side of the classroom, decorated with a literacy tree, wall decorations, bookshelves, seating cushions, and various age-appropriate books (storybooks, picture books, alphabet books, and writing practice materials). Additionally, a visitor checklist was introduced to monitor

children's participation. Once the setup was completed, a three-day orientation session (November 11–13, 2024) was conducted to familiarize children with the reading corner, encouraging voluntary participation before school hours, during literacy sessions, and after school.

Figure 1. Pretest Observation Documentation

2. Posttest

Table 4. Posttest Observation Results on Early Childhood Literacy at RA Islamic Mahardika

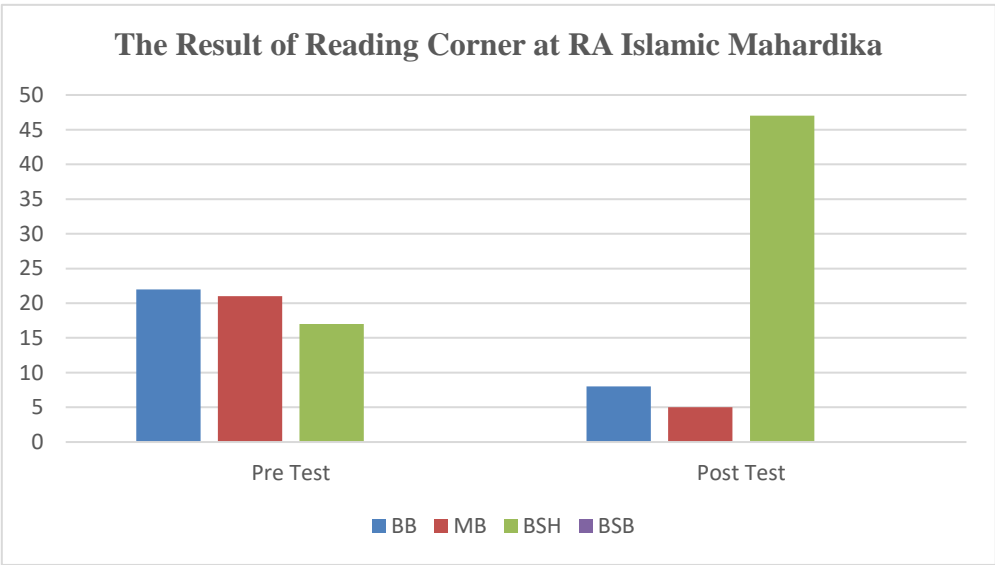| No	Indicator	Score			
		BB	MB	BSH	BSB
1	Reading text	2	2	16	-
2	Recognizing letter symbols	2	2	6	-
3	Listening to storytelling	2	-	18	-
4	Retelling stories	2	1	7	-

Here is the recapitulation during students visiting the reading corner:

Table 5. Student Visits to the Reading Corner at RA Islamic Mahardika

Day	Before Class	Literacy Session	Recess	After Class
Thursday	7 students	10 students	10 students	5 students
Friday	5 students	10 students	10 students	4 students
Monday	6 students	10 students	8 students	7 students
Tuesday	6 students	10 students	10 students	10 students
Wednesday	7 students	10 students	9 students	4 students
Thursday	8 students	10 students	9 students	6 students

The data above demonstrates that students frequently visited the reading corner, particularly during literacy sessions and recess periods. Attendance before and after school varied, depending on students' arrival times and parental pickup schedules. Some children arrived early and engaged in the reading corner, while others stayed longer after school, taking advantage of the reading space.

Table 6. Bar Chart: Pretest and Posttest Results of the Reading Corner Program at RA Islamic Mahardika

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The Result of Reading Corner at RA Islamic Mahardika

Following the implementation of the reading corner initiative, the posttest scores revealed a significant improvement in literacy engagement. Out of 10 students, 8 met the expected literacy development target in reading text, achieving a score of 16. In letter recognition, 6 students demonstrated expected progress with a score of 6. In listening to storytelling, 9 students reached the expected literacy standard, achieving a score of 18. Lastly, in retelling stories, 7 students demonstrated significant improvement, with a score of 7.

Figures 2 & 3. Posttest Observation Documentation

After presenting the findings above, the researcher also analyzed the data using SPSS version 26 to examine the data distribution and determine whether the observed effects were statistically significant.

Table 7. Normality Test (Shapiro-Wilk)

Variable	Statistic	df	Sig. (p)	Conclusion
Pretest	0.827	4	0.161	Normal
Posttest	0.842	4	0.202	Normal

The normality test was conducted to determine whether the pretest and posttest data followed a normal distribution. In this study, the Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that the pretest data had a statistic value of 0.827 with a p-value of 0.161, while the posttest data had a statistic value of 0.842 with a p-value of 0.202. Since both p-values are greater than 0.05, it can be concluded that the data are normally distributed. Therefore, the Paired Sample t-Test, an appropriate parametric test, was used for further statistical analysis.

Table 8. Paired Sample t-Test

Data Pair	Mean Difference	Std. Dev.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest-Posttest	-7.5	4.57	-3.57	3	0.038

After that, a Paired Sample t-Test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest results. The test results indicated a mean difference of -7.5 between pretest and posttest scores, with a standard deviation of 4.57. The obtained t-value was -3.57, with 3 degrees of freedom (df). The resulting p-value was 0.038, which is less than 0.05, indicating a statistically significant difference between pretest and posttest scores. In other words, the reading corner program implemented in this study had a significant impact on improving the literacy culture of early childhood students at RA Islamic Mahardika.

Table 9. Effect Size (Cohen's d)

Mean Difference	Pooled SD	Cohen's d	Interpretation
7.5	4.57	1.64	Large Effect

Additionally, to measure the magnitude of the reading corner program's impact on children's literacy culture, an effect size calculation was conducted using Cohen's d. The results showed an effect size of 1.64, which falls into the large effect category. This indicates that the reading corner program had a very strong influence in enhancing children's literacy culture. Based on the statistical tests performed, it can

be concluded that the reading corner program within the Independent Curriculum is highly effective in fostering reading interest and literacy culture among early childhood students.

The findings of this study align with previous research highlighting the effectiveness of structured literacy programs in early childhood education. Saragih and Lubis (2023) found that community-based literacy initiatives significantly enhanced children's engagement with reading and storytelling activities, similar to the observed impact of the reading corner program in this study. Additionally, Parapat et al. (2023) emphasized the role of a well-designed literacy environment in fostering a child's cognitive and linguistic development, which supports the conclusion that providing a dedicated reading space encourages independent learning and literacy growth.

Moreover, the results corroborate the work of Hamda et al. (2024), who demonstrated that incorporating interactive literacy resources in classrooms leads to measurable improvements in early childhood literacy skills. The significant effect size (Cohen's d = 1.64) observed in this study further reinforces the argument that immersive literacy interventions, such as the reading corner program, contribute positively to children's reading and writing abilities. These findings suggest that integrating literacy-friendly environments within the Independent Curriculum can be an effective strategy for improving early literacy culture and fostering a lifelong interest in reading among young learners.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Reading Corner Program implemented at RA Islamic Mahardika within the Independent Curriculum framework significantly enhances early childhood literacy culture. The results from the pretest and posttest comparisons indicate a statistically significant improvement in children's literacy engagement. The Paired Sample t-Test yielded a p-value of 0.038, confirming that the intervention had a substantial impact. Furthermore, the effect size calculation (Cohen's d = 1.64) categorizes the effect as large, highlighting the program's strong influence in fostering literacy development.

The findings suggest that a structured and engaging literacy environment, such as a well-designed reading corner, can effectively enhance reading interest, storytelling skills, and overall literacy culture in young learners. These results align with previous studies emphasizing the importance of early literacy interventions. Therefore, integrating interactive and engaging literacy spaces within the Independent Curriculum is highly recommended to support literacy development and create a foundation for lifelong learning among early childhood students.

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