

UNICEF Education

A corner for every child - Case study

SENEGAL

Reading corners are transforming literacy in Senegal

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In Senegal, too many children are struggling to master the foundational skill of reading. Only one in three students achieve basic proficiency in reading by the end of primary school, and by lower secondary school, [just 9 per cent are reading at the minimum proficiency level](#). One of the major barriers to improving literacy outcomes is the lack of access to books and learning materials, particularly in socioeconomically disadvantaged schools and rural areas.

Recognizing that foundational skills like literacy are critical for long-term development and economic growth, Senegal has shifted its focus from expanding access to education, to improving its quality as outlined in the 'Quality, Equity, and Transparency Improvement Program (2018–2030).' This national strategy reinforces the government's commitment to ensuring all children acquire essential skills.

As part of this broader effort, in 2021 Senegal's Ministry of National Education (MEN), with support from UNICEF, launched the Reading Corners initiative, a cost-effective intervention designed to complement proven approaches like Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) and structured pedagogy to accelerate foundational learning. The initiative creates dedicated spaces within classrooms that are carefully designed to make reading more accessible, engaging, and enjoyable.

Students access Reading Corners during both structured class time and self-directed moments, with activities ranging from guided reading to book clubs, dramatizations, and community read-aloud events that promote literacy, creativity, and civic values.

Beyond textbooks, research has shown that [incorporating newspapers, magazines, and other literature into classrooms enriches teaching and fosters multidimensional learning](#), helping students apply their knowledge in real-life contexts. Moreover, [studies suggest](#) that investments in reading books and school libraries have an even greater impact on student achievement in early grades than textbook provision alone.

Some key gains show that the learning corners foster positive attitudes toward learning and can help develop a lifelong love for books, promote independent learning, encourage choice and autonomy, leading to more engaged and motivated learners. They also support social skills, communication, creativity, emotional well-being and help teachers meet the unique needs of their students through diverse materials.

Each corner includes:

- A **selection of books** in both French and national languages, covering fiction, nonfiction, and interactive learning materials.
- A **child-friendly environment** with mats, chairs, and shelves designed for young readers.
- **Interactive activities** like storytelling competitions and role-playing inspired by books.

RESULTS

Between 2021 and 2022, the initiative reached 133,528 children across 300 schools in eight regions. During this time teachers were also trained to incorporate books into their lessons, while volunteers and community members supported learning by organizing storytelling sessions and hosting 'learning camps,' which are remedial education programmes held during school vacations for students who are struggling to keep up.

Although not yet systematically evaluated for impacts on learning outcomes, qualitative evidence shows that Reading Corners are a valuable complement to other proven foundational learning interventions. The clearest evidence comes from teachers, students, parents, and education officials who report that Reading Corners improve reading habits, boost student confidence, and make classrooms more engaging and inclusive. Overwhelmingly, school leaders and local education officials call for a scale up the initiative to more schools – a strong testament to its success.

- **Teachers report a shift in student engagement and confidence in reading**

- "Since the installation of this reading corner, I've noticed that the level of the students is improving, especially in reading." — Gnagna Regina Sambou, Teacher at Ataba Tabar School

- "For me, the most rewarding thing is to see that the reading corner now allows students to express themselves more freely." — Brigitte Gomis, Teacher at Ataba Tabar School

- **Families notice improvements in children's learning and motivation**

- "There's been a big difference since she got these books. She studies better at school, and her level has improved a lot." — Oumou Sylla, Parent of a 12-year-old student

- **School administrators recognize the impact and call for expansion**

- "If there's anything to recommend, it's that these reading corners should be extended so that as many schools as possible can have them." — Ibrahima Konaté, Education Inspector & General Secretary at the Education and Training Inspectorate in Ziguinchor

- "Providing educational resources for reading corners is a priority for the government." — Ibrahima Diatta, Inspector of Elementary Education, Ziguinchor Academy

LESSONS LEARNED

The initiative faced early challenges, including book procurement delays, overcrowded classrooms, and school disruptions. However, the commitment of local communities and teachers helped overcome many hurdles. Schools introduced rotating schedules for Reading Corner activities, while volunteer-led sessions ensured children could still access books even when classes were disrupted.

One clear lesson emerged: local ownership is crucial. When parents, teachers, and education leaders are actively involved, initiatives like this go beyond implementation and become a lasting part of student's learning journey.

NEXT STEPS

Building on the success of the pilot phase, the MEN and UNICEF plan to expand Reading Corners to reach even more children across Senegal. Efforts will focus on enhancing teacher training to better integrate literacy activities into daily lessons and developing new interactive materials, including educational games and digital tools. To strengthen monitoring, the Ministry is developing a standardized tool in 2025 to measure learner progress linked to reading corner activities. The initiative is also being integrated into Senegal's national bilingual education programme, with UNICEF supporting the rollout of bilingual classes in 30 schools where reading corners are already established.

Cost effectiveness: One of the initiative's greatest strengths is its cost-effectiveness. Each Reading Corner costs **around US\$710** — an investment that **benefits hundreds of children per school**. While implementation may vary by school, the MEN's aims to establish reading corners by learning level—first, second, and third stages—rather than just one per school. By leveraging existing classroom spaces and engaging community volunteers, the programme minimizes costs while maximizing reach. At approximately US\$1.60 per student, the initiative proves that small investments can yield transformative results.

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