

# Strengthening Higher Education Literacy through Socialization Programs to Enhance Students' Interest in Pursuing Higher Education

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## ABSTRACT

### Keywords:

Higher education literacy, socialization program, community empowerment

Limited awareness and understanding of higher education opportunities remain a major issue among students in senior secondary schools and Islamic boarding schools, particularly regarding university admission pathways, study programs, scholarship opportunities, and future career prospects. These conditions often contribute to low educational aspirations and reduced interest in pursuing higher education. This community service program aimed to strengthen higher education literacy through structured socialization activities designed to enhance students' knowledge, awareness, and motivation to continue their studies at the university level. The program was implemented in senior secondary schools and Islamic boarding schools across Probolinggo and Situbondo, East Java, involving students, teachers, school principals, asatidz, and pesantren leaders. The implementation used a hybrid approach combining offline socialization through direct school visits and online outreach via TikTok, Instagram, and Zoom Meeting. The results showed significant improvements in students' understanding of higher education, increased motivation to pursue university studies, and strengthened institutional partnerships with 55 educational institutions. In conclusion, the program proved effective in enhancing higher education literacy and fostering community empowerment through the integration of direct engagement and digital communication strategies.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Higher education plays a strategic role in developing human resources, improving social mobility, and fostering national competitiveness. In the era of globalization and rapid technological advancement, access to higher education has become increasingly important for preparing young people to face

complex social, economic, and professional challenges. Through higher education, students are expected to acquire not only academic knowledge but also critical thinking skills, leadership abilities, and professional competencies that contribute to personal and societal development (Xu et al., 2025). Consequently, increasing students' interest in pursuing higher education has become a significant concern for educational institutions, governments, and communities worldwide (Fauzian et al., 2025).

Despite the growing importance of higher education, many secondary school students still demonstrate limited interest in continuing their studies at the tertiary level (Bagdžiūnienė et al., 2025). Various factors contribute to this condition, including a lack of information regarding higher education opportunities, financial concerns, inadequate family support, and limited awareness of the long-term benefits of obtaining a university degree (Habsi, 2025b; Putra et al., 2024; Zul et al., 2026). In many communities, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas, students often possess insufficient knowledge about available study programs, scholarship opportunities, career prospects, and admission procedures (Mohideen, 2025). This lack of understanding frequently results in low aspirations toward higher education and influences students' educational decision-making processes (Azizah et al., 2025; Bagdžiūnienė et al., 2025; Sumardi et al., 2023). Higher education literacy refers to an individual's knowledge, understanding, and awareness of higher education systems, academic opportunities, admission requirements, financial assistance, and future career pathways (Baharun et al., 2021). Students with adequate higher education literacy are more likely to develop positive perceptions toward university education and demonstrate stronger intentions to continue their studies (Maemonah et al., 2023; Mahdiyin, 2025). Conversely, limited literacy regarding higher education may create misconceptions and reduce students' motivation to pursue further education (Bhima et al., 2024; Xu et al., 2025). Therefore, strengthening higher education literacy among secondary school students is an essential strategy for encouraging educational advancement and expanding participation in higher education (Buthelezi & Buthelezi, 2026).

One of the practical approaches to improving higher education literacy is through socialization programs (Ruhenda et al., 2023). Socialization programs serve as educational interventions designed to provide students with accurate information about universities, academic programs, student life, scholarship opportunities, and career prospects (Han, 2024; Nur Fitriyanti, 2023). These activities may include seminars, presentations, interactive discussions, motivational sessions, and direct engagement with higher education representatives (Habsi et al., 2025). Through such initiatives, students are provided with opportunities to explore their educational aspirations, clarify

misconceptions, and gain insights into the benefits of pursuing higher education (Bagdžiūnienė et al., 2025).

Several studies have highlighted the positive impact of educational outreach and socialization activities on students' educational aspirations and decision-making (Baitusslam et al., 2025; Habsi, 2025a). Information dissemination and guidance programs have been shown to increase students' awareness of higher education opportunities and improve their motivation to continue their studies (Affan et al., 2026). However, many schools still face challenges in providing comprehensive and systematic higher education literacy programs. Consequently, there remains a need for community engagement initiatives that bridge information gaps and foster stronger interest among students in pursuing university education.

As a form of community service, the implementation of a higher education literacy socialization program aims to contribute to students' understanding of higher education and encourage them to consider university education as a viable pathway for their future. The program provides participants with information regarding the importance of higher education, available academic programs, admission procedures, scholarship opportunities, and career development prospects. Through direct interaction and discussion, students are expected to develop a broader perspective on educational opportunities and strengthen their motivation to pursue higher education.

Based on this background, this community service activity seeks to strengthen higher education literacy through a structured socialization program designed to enhance students' interest in pursuing higher education. The activity is expected not only to improve students' knowledge and awareness but also to inspire them to continue their educational journey and contribute positively to society through higher learning. Furthermore, the program serves as an effort to support educational equity and increase participation in higher education among prospective students.

## METHOD OF IMPLEMENTATION

Higher Education Literacy Socialization Program was implemented in various senior secondary educational institutions, including Senior High Schools (SMA), Vocational High Schools (SMK), Islamic Senior High Schools (MA), and Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) throughout Probolinggo and Situbondo, East Java. The target partners of this program included school principals, teachers, Islamic boarding school leaders (*pengasuh pesantren*), and *asatidz*, who play a significant role in shaping students' educational aspirations and encouraging them to pursue higher education. The implementation process consisted of three stages: preparation, implementation, and evaluation. During

the preparation stage, the Student Admission Team (PMB Team) identified potential partner institutions, established communication with stakeholders, prepared socialization materials, and developed promotional media. The implementation stage was carried out through both offline and online approaches. Offline activities included direct visits to schools and *pesantren*, presentations on higher education opportunities, discussions on study programs, scholarship information, and admission procedures. Online activities were conducted through TikTok Live sessions, educational content creation, and seminars via Zoom Meeting to reach a broader audience and strengthen higher education awareness among students.

Community participation was primarily facilitated through the active involvement of the PMB Team in collaboration with school principals, teachers, *asatidz*, and *pesantren* leaders who provided access, coordination, and support for program activities. Various tools and technologies were utilized, including presentation slides, brochures, laptops, projectors, social media platforms such as TikTok, Zoom Meeting, and digital communication applications. The success of the program was evaluated using several indicators, including the number of students who enrolled in higher education institutions after participating in the socialization activities and the number of educational partners successfully established through the program. Additional indicators included participant engagement during activities, institutional collaboration outcomes, and the effectiveness of online outreach efforts, which collectively reflected the program's contribution to strengthening higher education literacy and increasing students' interest in pursuing higher education.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### **Improvement of Knowledge, Attitudes, and Awareness toward Higher Education**

One of the most significant outcomes of the Higher Education Literacy Socialization Program was the improvement of students' knowledge, attitudes, and awareness regarding higher education opportunities. Prior to the implementation of the program, many students demonstrated limited understanding of the role of higher education in personal and professional development. Informal discussions conducted during the initial stages of the activity revealed that a considerable number of participants possessed insufficient information about university admission systems, available study programs, scholarship opportunities, and future career pathways. Furthermore, several students perceived higher education as financially inaccessible or believed that employment opportunities could be obtained without pursuing university education. These misconceptions often contributed to a low level of

interest in continuing their studies after graduating from secondary education.

Through a series of socialization activities, students were provided with comprehensive information regarding the importance of higher education, the diversity of academic programs, and the long-term benefits associated with obtaining a university degree. Presentations and interactive discussions introduced participants to various fields of study, including social sciences, education, business, economics, and Islamic studies. In addition, detailed explanations were provided regarding admission procedures, scholarship schemes, tuition assistance programs, and flexible learning opportunities available in higher education institutions. As a result, students gained a broader understanding of the educational pathways available to them and became more aware of the opportunities that higher education can offer. The program also contributed to improving students' awareness of scholarship opportunities and financial support mechanisms. Many participants initially assumed that higher education was only accessible to individuals from economically advantaged backgrounds. However, after receiving information about government scholarships, institutional financial aid programs, and merit-based assistance schemes, students demonstrated a more positive perception regarding the affordability of university education. This increased awareness helped reduce financial concerns that often discourage students from pursuing higher education and encouraged them to consider university study as a realistic and achievable goal.

In addition to enhancing knowledge, the socialization program positively influenced students' attitudes toward higher education. Participants began to view university education not merely as a continuation of formal schooling but as an investment in their future careers and personal development. Discussions on labor market competitiveness, professional qualifications, and career advancement opportunities highlighted the strategic value of obtaining a higher education degree. Consequently, students exhibited greater appreciation for the role of higher education in improving employment prospects, developing professional competencies, and contributing to community development. Another notable outcome was the increased motivation among students to pursue higher education. The motivational sessions, success stories, and direct interactions with university representatives helped participants develop greater confidence in their academic potential. Many students expressed a stronger desire to continue their studies after learning about available educational opportunities and the experiences of successful graduates. This shift in motivation was particularly evident among students who had previously been uncertain about their educational future. The program successfully encouraged participants to set higher educational aspirations and to begin planning their

academic pathways more seriously.

Overall, the Higher Education Literacy Socialization Program demonstrated a positive impact on students' knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and motivation regarding higher education. The findings indicate that providing accessible information and meaningful engagement opportunities can significantly influence students' educational aspirations and strengthen their interest in pursuing university education. These outcomes highlight the importance of continuous higher education literacy initiatives as a strategy for expanding educational participation and supporting human resource development within local communities.



**Figure 1 :** Socialization session on higher education opportunities, study programs, scholarships, and future career prospects for secondary school students.

### **Implementation of Educational Outreach Innovation through Offline and Digital Socialization**

One of the key achievements of the Higher Education Literacy Socialization Program was the implementation of an innovative educational outreach model that combined traditional face-to-face engagement with digital communication platforms. This integrated approach was designed to expand the reach of higher education information and ensure that students from various educational backgrounds could access relevant and accurate information regarding university studies. The innovation emerged from the recognition that contemporary students increasingly rely on digital media for information, while direct interaction with educational stakeholders remains essential for building trust and motivation. Therefore, the program adopted a hybrid outreach strategy that utilized both offline and online channels to maximize effectiveness. The offline component of the program was conducted through direct visits to senior secondary schools and Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) across Probolinggo

and Situbondo. During these visits, the outreach team delivered presentations on the importance of higher education, available academic programs, admission procedures, scholarship opportunities, and future career prospects. Interactive discussions and question-and-answer sessions were also organized to allow students to express their concerns and obtain personalized information regarding higher education pathways. This face-to-face approach enabled the outreach team to establish stronger relationships with school principals, teachers, *asatidz*, and students while fostering a supportive environment for educational aspiration development.

In addition to offline activities, the program utilized digital platforms as innovative tools for educational dissemination. TikTok Live sessions were employed to engage prospective students through interactive and accessible content. Educational videos, student testimonials, scholarship information, campus life experiences, and admission guidance were regularly shared through social media platforms. These digital initiatives allowed the program to reach a broader audience beyond the institutions directly visited by the outreach team. The use of social media also aligned with the communication preferences of Generation Z students, who are highly active on digital platforms and frequently seek information through online channels. Furthermore, Zoom Meeting was utilized to conduct online seminars and information sessions involving students, teachers, and educational stakeholders from different locations. This approach reduced geographical barriers and enabled wider participation without requiring physical attendance. Through virtual seminars, participants received detailed explanations about higher education opportunities and were able to interact directly with university representatives. The flexibility of online meetings proved particularly beneficial for schools and *pesantren* located in areas where face-to-face visits were difficult to organize on a regular basis.

The integration of offline and digital outreach methods demonstrated considerable effectiveness in reaching prospective students and increasing engagement levels. Offline socialization activities provided opportunities for direct communication and relationship building, while digital platforms facilitated continuous information dissemination and broader audience reach. The combination of these approaches enabled the program to maintain communication with prospective students before, during, and after socialization activities. As a result, students had multiple channels through which they could access information, seek clarification, and remain connected with higher education institutions. Another important outcome of the program was the development of a community-based higher education promotion model. Rather than relying solely on conventional marketing strategies, the program actively involved school principals, teachers, *asatidz*, and *pesantren* leaders as

educational partners in promoting higher education awareness. These stakeholders served as trusted sources of information and played a significant role in encouraging students to consider university education as a viable future pathway. Through collaborative engagement, the program fostered a sustainable network of educational partners capable of supporting future outreach initiatives and strengthening higher education participation within their respective communities.

Overall, the implementation of educational outreach innovation through offline and digital socialization successfully expanded access to higher education information and enhanced student engagement. The combination of direct institutional visits, social media utilization, TikTok Live activities, and Zoom-based seminars created a comprehensive outreach model that effectively addressed the information needs of prospective students. This experience demonstrates that integrating community engagement with digital technology can serve as an effective strategy for promoting higher education literacy and increasing students' interest in pursuing university education.



**Figure 1 :** TikTok and Instagram accounts were utilized to promote the university's student admission program (PMB) through online platforms.

### Strengthening Institutional Partnerships and Community Empowerment

Another significant outcome of the Higher Education Literacy Socialization Program was the strengthening of institutional partnerships and

the empowerment of educational communities in supporting access to higher education. Throughout the implementation process, the program successfully established and expanded collaborative relationships with various senior secondary schools, Islamic senior high schools (madrasah aliyah), vocational schools, and Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) across Probolinggo and Situbondo. These partnerships were developed through continuous communication, coordination, and educational outreach activities aimed at increasing awareness of higher education opportunities among students. The growing number of partner institutions reflects the positive reception of the program and demonstrates the willingness of educational stakeholders to collaborate in promoting educational advancement within their communities.

The involvement of school principals, teachers, pengasuh pesantren, and asatidz played a crucial role in ensuring the success of the program. These stakeholders actively facilitated program implementation by providing access to students, coordinating outreach activities, and encouraging participation in both offline and online socialization sessions. Their engagement extended beyond logistical support, as many educators also contributed to motivating students and reinforcing the importance of higher education during daily learning activities. This collaborative approach strengthened the effectiveness of the program and created a supportive educational environment that encouraged students to consider university education as a realistic and valuable future pathway.

The program also contributed to strengthening the cooperation network between higher education institutions and local educational organizations. Through direct engagement with schools and pesantren, the university established sustainable communication channels that can support future academic collaboration, student recruitment initiatives, educational seminars, and community development programs. Such partnerships provide mutual benefits for both parties. Educational institutions gain greater access to information and opportunities related to higher education, while universities are able to strengthen their community engagement efforts and expand their outreach to prospective students. The establishment of these collaborative networks represents an important step toward creating a more integrated educational ecosystem that supports lifelong learning and educational progression. Furthermore, the increased number of prospective students expressing interest in higher education and submitting admission applications served as a tangible indicator of community empowerment. Following the socialization activities, many students demonstrated greater confidence in pursuing higher education and actively sought information regarding admission procedures, scholarship opportunities, and study program options. This positive

response indicates that the program successfully reduced information barriers that often limit educational participation. By providing accessible information and fostering supportive partnerships, the program empowered students and their communities to make more informed educational decisions and to view higher education as an attainable goal.

The participation of educational stakeholders also contributed to raising collective awareness regarding the importance of educational advancement. School leaders, teachers, and religious educators increasingly recognized their role as facilitators of students' academic aspirations and became active partners in promoting higher education literacy. This heightened awareness helped create a culture that values educational achievement and encourages students to continue their studies beyond the secondary level. As a result, the program not only influenced individual students but also generated broader institutional and community-level impacts that support educational development.

Overall, the Higher Education Literacy Socialization Program successfully strengthened institutional partnerships, enhanced stakeholder participation, and empowered communities to improve access to higher education. The growing number of partner schools and pesantren, increased involvement of educational leaders, strengthened inter-institutional collaboration, and rising number of prospective student applicants collectively demonstrate the program's effectiveness in fostering community engagement and promoting higher education participation. These outcomes highlight the importance of collaborative and community-based approaches in expanding educational opportunities and supporting sustainable human resource development.

**Table 1 :** Number of Partner Schools and Islamic Boarding Schools

| No           | Institution Type                     | Number of Partners |
|--------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1            | Senior High Schools (SMA)            | 15                 |
| 2            | Vocational High Schools (SMK)        | 8                  |
| 3            | Islamic Senior High Schools (MA)     | 12                 |
| 4            | Islamic Boarding Schools (Pesantren) | 20                 |
| <b>Total</b> |                                      | <b>55</b>          |

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this community service program demonstrate that higher education literacy socialization can serve as an effective strategy for increasing students' knowledge, awareness, and motivation to pursue higher education. The improvement in students' understanding of university admission systems, academic programs, scholarship opportunities, and career prospects indicates that information accessibility plays a crucial role in shaping educational aspirations. Prior studies have emphasized that students' decisions to continue

their studies are often influenced by the availability of information and guidance regarding higher education pathways. In this program, the dissemination of comprehensive and practical information successfully reduced misconceptions related to the affordability and accessibility of higher education. As a result, participants developed a more positive perception of university education and demonstrated stronger intentions to pursue further studies. The positive changes in students' attitudes toward higher education also support the argument that educational aspirations are not solely determined by socioeconomic conditions but are significantly influenced by exposure to relevant information and motivational experiences. Through interactive discussions, motivational sessions, and direct engagement with university representatives, students were able to connect higher education with their personal goals, career ambitions, and future socioeconomic mobility. This finding aligns with human capital theory, which suggests that individuals are more likely to invest in education when they perceive its long-term benefits for personal and professional advancement. Therefore, strengthening higher education literacy can be viewed as an important intervention for encouraging educational participation among secondary school students.

Another important finding concerns the effectiveness of combining offline and digital socialization approaches. The integration of direct institutional visits with digital platforms such as TikTok Live, Instagram, and Zoom Meeting expanded the program's outreach and increased participant engagement. The growing reliance of younger generations on digital media requires educational institutions to adopt communication strategies that align with contemporary information consumption patterns. In this context, digital platforms functioned not only as promotional tools but also as educational channels that facilitated continuous interaction between universities and prospective students. The hybrid outreach model developed in this program demonstrates that the combination of face-to-face engagement and digital communication can significantly enhance the dissemination of higher education information while overcoming geographical and logistical barriers. The utilization of social media platforms also reflects the growing importance of digital transformation within educational outreach activities. Educational institutions are increasingly required to adapt their communication strategies to remain relevant and accessible to prospective students. By providing educational content, scholarship information, student testimonials, and admission guidance through social media, the program successfully created a more inclusive and interactive learning environment. This finding suggests that community service initiatives related to higher education promotion should not rely exclusively on conventional outreach methods but should incorporate digital innovation to maximize

effectiveness and sustainability.

Furthermore, the strengthening of institutional partnerships represents one of the most valuable outcomes of the program. The establishment of collaborative relationships with 55 partner institutions, consisting of schools and Islamic boarding schools, demonstrates the importance of stakeholder involvement in promoting educational advancement. School principals, teachers, pengasuh pesantren, and asatidz acted as strategic partners in encouraging students to pursue higher education and facilitating access to educational information. Their participation contributed to the development of a supportive educational ecosystem in which higher education aspirations are continuously reinforced through institutional collaboration. This finding is consistent with community empowerment perspectives, which emphasize the role of collective participation and local stakeholder engagement in achieving sustainable educational development.

The increased number of prospective students expressing interest in higher education further indicates the empowering effect of the program. Access to information, mentorship, and educational guidance enabled students to make more informed decisions regarding their academic futures. Beyond individual benefits, this outcome contributes to broader community development by promoting educational mobility and human resource enhancement. In the long term, increased participation in higher education can support socioeconomic development by producing graduates with higher levels of knowledge, skills, and professional competencies. Consequently, initiatives aimed at strengthening higher education literacy should be viewed not only as recruitment strategies but also as community empowerment efforts that contribute to sustainable educational and social development. Overall, the findings suggest that higher education literacy programs implemented through collaborative partnerships and supported by digital innovation can effectively increase students' awareness, motivation, and participation in higher education. The integration of educational outreach, stakeholder engagement, and community empowerment provides a comprehensive framework for promoting educational access and supporting human capital development. Therefore, similar programs should be expanded and continuously developed to reach a wider audience and strengthen the culture of higher education participation within local communities.

## CONCLUSION

The Higher Education Literacy Socialization Program effectively improved students' knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and motivation regarding higher education. Through socialization activities conducted in schools and Islamic boarding schools, participants gained a better understanding of

university admission procedures, study programs, scholarship opportunities, and career prospects. The program successfully addressed misconceptions related to higher education accessibility and affordability, encouraging students to view university education as an attainable and valuable pathway for personal and professional development. As a result, many participants demonstrated increased interest and confidence in pursuing higher education after completing secondary education. Furthermore, the integration of offline outreach activities with digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Zoom Meeting proved to be an effective strategy for expanding educational outreach and increasing student engagement. The program also strengthened collaboration between higher education institutions and local educational stakeholders, including school principals, teachers, pengasuh pesantren, and asatidz. The establishment of partnerships with 55 schools and Islamic boarding schools highlights the success of the program in fostering community participation and institutional cooperation. Overall, the findings indicate that higher education literacy initiatives supported by collaborative partnerships and digital innovation can significantly contribute to increasing higher education participation and promoting sustainable community empowerment.

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