

ENHANCING HIGHER EDUCATION LITERACY THROUGH PEER-SHARING SOCIALIZATION: COMMUNITY SERVICE FOR SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN BANDA ACEH

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Abstract

Many high school students in Indonesia lack access to accurate information about university study programs, which impedes informed career decision-making. This community service activity aimed to improve the knowledge and understanding of Grade XI students at MAN Model Banda Aceh regarding the profile, curriculum, student activities, and graduate career prospects of the Development Economics Study Program (EKP) at the Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Syiah Kuala (USK). A participatory socialization method was employed, encompassing structured presentations, group discussions, and interactive question-and-answer sessions, conducted on May 20, 2026. The activity engaged 42 students from the Grade XI Science class (IPA). Activity evaluation was conducted through direct observation of participant engagement, photographic documentation, and qualitative assessment of student participation during discussion and question-and-answer sessions. Results indicated high levels of enthusiasm and active participation, with students raising numerous substantive questions covering program distinctions, admission pathways, campus life, and graduate career prospects. These outcomes confirm that interactive, face-to-face program socialization is effective in broadening students' educational literacy and supporting more informed career decision-making among secondary school students.

Keywords: educational literacy, career planning, Development Economics Study Program, higher education socialization, community service

INTRODUCTION

The selection of a university study program constitutes one of the most consequential decisions in a young person's educational journey. An informed choice requires students to possess accurate knowledge of program content, admission pathways, career prospects, and program characteristics. However, a significant number of high school students in Indonesia particularly those in schools with limited career guidance resources — lack access to such information (Wardani & Sanjaya, 2020). This informational gap frequently leads students to make decisions based on incomplete perceptions, social pressure, or hearsay rather than on a sound understanding of available options (Santoso et al., 2021).

MAN Model Banda Aceh represents a prominent Islamic senior high school in the provincial capital, yet its Grade XI students reported limited familiarity with the Development

Economics Study Program (EKP) at the Faculty of Economics and Business (FEB), Universitas Syiah Kuala (USK). Many students conflated development economics with management or accounting, and few were aware of the program's curriculum orientation, regional development focus, or graduate career pathways. This challenge has also been highlighted in recent studies emphasizing that limited access to reliable higher education information may reduce students' confidence in educational decision-making and restrict their participation in higher education (Baines et al., 2022; Ní Chorcóra et al., 2023).

To better understand the needs of the target participants, the community service team conducted a preliminary needs assessment through informal discussions with the guidance counselor and curriculum teachers at MAN Model Banda Aceh prior to the implementation of the activity. The discussions indicated that most Grade XI students had not previously received specific information regarding the Development Economics Study Program at Universitas Syiah Kuala. In addition, many students experienced difficulty distinguishing Development Economics from related disciplines such as Management and Accounting and had limited understanding of the program's curriculum, career opportunities, and admission pathways. These findings confirmed the existence of an information gap and served as the basis for designing the socialization materials and learning activities implemented in this community service program.

Education literacy the capacity of students to access, evaluate, and act upon accurate information about educational pathways is an essential foundation for sound academic and career planning (Prasetyo & Hidayat, 2019). Strengthening education literacy through proactive university socialization has been shown to improve students' decision-making quality and reduce post-enrollment regret (Mulyadi et al., 2022). The urgency of such interventions is heightened by the competitive university admission environment in Indonesia, where ill-informed choices carry significant consequences for students' long-term educational and professional trajectories.

The EKP FEB USK program is particularly relevant to the human resource development needs of Aceh Province, producing graduates equipped to work in development planning agencies, financial institutions, research bodies, and the public sector. Despite this relevance, program awareness among secondary school students remains limited. Addressing this gap through a participatory peer-sharing socialization delivered by current EKP students who can convey authentic program experiences represents a novel and effective approach to closing the information asymmetry between universities and prospective students (Rahardja et al., 2021). Unlike conventional university outreach activities that primarily rely on one-way presentations, this community service program adopted an interactive peer-sharing approach in which current Development Economics students acted as facilitators and shared their academic experiences through participatory discussions.

By integrating structured program information with authentic student experiences, the activity created a more engaging learning environment that encouraged participants to actively explore higher education options, ask questions, and relate the information to their own educational aspirations. This approach represents a practical contribution to community engagement by promoting educational literacy through collaborative and student-centered learning. Recent studies have further emphasized the importance of school–university partnerships and student-centered outreach initiatives in improving educational aspirations and facilitating informed study program selection (González Amador et al., 2022; UNESCO IITE, 2025; Negrea &

Gartland, 2025).

This activity was therefore designed with three operational objectives: (1) to increase students' understanding of the EKP FEB USK program profile, curriculum, and student life; (2) to clarify the admission pathways and scholarship opportunities available to prospective students; and (3) to enhance students' awareness of career prospects available to EKP graduates, thereby supporting more informed educational decision-making.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This activity draws on three complementary theoretical perspectives. Holland's vocational personality theory (Holland, 1997) posits that career satisfaction derives from congruence between individual interests and program characteristics, underscoring the importance of providing accurate program information to enable well-matched choices. Freire's participatory pedagogy (Freire, 2005) informed the design of the socialization as an interactive, dialogue-based activity rather than a one-directional lecture. Social cognitive career theory (Savickas, 2013) further supports the use of direct, face-to-face interaction with role models in this case, current EKP students as a means of stimulating career interest and broadening students' sense of self-efficacy in pursuing higher education.

Recent empirical evidence reinforces these perspectives: extended, direct interaction with university research and near-peer role models has been received more positively than conventional outreach and has been associated with shifts in students' aspirations and career decision-making self-efficacy (Archer et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024). Evidence on widening participation and outreach further indicates that peer-led approaches such as peer learning and peer mentoring can yield positive outcomes for students (Pointon-Haas et al., 2024), underpinning the peer-sharing design adopted in this activity.

METHOD

This community service initiative employed a participatory socialization approach. The activity was conducted on May 20, 2026, at MAN Model Banda Aceh, engaging 42 Grade XI Science stream (IPA) students. MAN Model Banda Aceh was selected as the partner school due to its status as a model madrasah with a substantial Grade XI cohort approaching the stage of post-secondary planning, yet with limited prior exposure to higher education program information. Implementation proceeded through three structured stages, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Implementation Stages of the Socialization Activity

Stage	Activities	Expected Outputs
1. Needs Assessment	Conducted preliminary observations through discussions with the guidance counselor and curriculum teachers to identify students' knowledge gaps regarding higher education and the Development Economics Study Program. The team also reviewed the school's characteristics and identified students' informational needs related to university selection.	Identification of partner needs, problem mapping, and baseline information used to design the community service program.

2. Program Planning and Preparation	Coordinated with school authorities regarding the activity schedule and technical arrangements. Prepared presentation materials, brochures, multimedia content, discussion guides, attendance lists, observation sheets, and documentation instruments.	Approved implementation schedule, prepared learning materials, administrative documents, and evaluation instruments.
3. Program Implementation	Delivered an interactive presentation introducing Universitas Syiah Kuala, the Faculty of Economics and Business, and the Development Economics Study Program. The session included explanations of the curriculum, student organizations, scholarship opportunities, admission pathways, career prospects, and peer-sharing experiences by current students, followed by an open discussion and question-and-answer session.	Forty-two Grade XI students actively participated in the activity and engaged in discussions overing academic, admission, and career-related topics.
4. Monitoring and Documentation	Observed participant engagement throughout the activity using structured observation sheets. Recorded the number and quality of questions raised, documented student participation, and collected photographic evidence of the implementation process.	Observation records, participation documentation, thematic classification of questions, and activity documentation.
5. Reflection and Evaluation	Evaluated the implementation by reviewing participant engagement, discussion dynamics, achievement of activity objectives, and strengths and limitations of the program. Reflections from the implementation team were used to formulate recommendations for future community service activities.	Qualitative evaluation report, lessons learned, recommendations for program improvement, and sustainability plan.

The implementation framework presented in Table 1 reflects a participatory community service approach consisting of five sequential stages: needs assessment, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. This framework ensured that the intervention addressed the actual needs of the partner school while facilitating systematic implementation and continuous reflection throughout the program. The participatory approach encouraged active interaction between facilitators and students, enabling the socialization process to become more engaging and responsive to participants' educational needs.

The socialization content covered three principal components: (1) the institutional profile of Universitas Syiah Kuala and FEB USK; (2) the EKP program profile, including curriculum structure, concentrations, campus facilities, and student co-curricular activities; and (3) career prospects for EKP graduates in government agencies, financial institutions, and research organizations. Materials were prepared and delivered by current EKP students, providing an authentic peer-to-peer perspective that is consistent with social cognitive career theory (Savickas, 2013).

Activity evaluation relied on qualitative methods appropriate to the scope of this socialization initiative. Direct observation was conducted throughout the session to assess participant

engagement levels, the quality and quantity of questions raised during discussion, and the dynamics of student participation. Photographic documentation was recorded to provide visual evidence of activity implementation. The evaluation did not employ pre-test or post-test instruments; as such, quantitative measurement of knowledge change was not conducted in this activity and is acknowledged as a limitation.

To structure the evaluation, the activity defined four qualitative indicators of success: (1) participant attendance and active involvement; (2) the number and thematic breadth of substantive questions raised during the discussion; (3) the breadth of participation across the cohort rather than among a few individuals; and (4) participants' expressed intention to seek further information about the program. The extent to which each indicator was achieved is reported in the Results and Discussion section (Table 4).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The socialization activity was successfully conducted on May 20, 2026, engaging all 42 Grade XI Science students at MAN Model Banda Aceh. The session lasted approximately 30 minutes beginning at 12:15 PM and proceeded smoothly through all planned stages. A qualitative overview of activity outcomes is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of Activity Outcomes

Indicator	Result
Number of participants	42 Grade XI Science students
Number of substantive questions raised	12 questions
Students who actively raised questions during Q&A	Multiple participants (observed); substantive questions raised across 4 thematic areas
Thematic areas covered in student questions	4 areas: program distinctions, admission & scholarships, student life, graduate career prospects
General participant response	High enthusiasm observed; several students expressed intention to seek further information about EKP

Participant engagement was consistently high throughout the session. During the interactive Q&A session, students actively raised substantive questions spanning four thematic areas: (1) distinctions between EKP and cognate programs such as Management and Economics; (2) scholarship opportunities and admission pathways to FEB USK; (3) authentic experiences of current EKP students regarding campus life; and (4) employment prospects and salary expectations for graduates in government and private sectors. The volume and quality of student questions, as observed directly by the facilitation team, indicate that the peer-delivered socialization successfully stimulated intellectual curiosity and deeper interest in program exploration.

A thematic breakdown of the twelve substantive questions raised by participants during the question-and-answer session is presented in Table 3. The questions clustered around four thematic areas, with the largest share concerning admission pathways and scholarships, followed by program distinctions and graduate career prospects.

Table 3. Thematic Distribution of Student Questions during the Q&A Session

Thematic Area	Focus of Student Questions	Number of Questions
Program distinctions	Differences between EKP and cognate programs such as Management, Economics, and Accounting	3
Admission pathways and scholarships	Entry routes to FEB USK and available scholarship opportunities for prospective students	4
Student life and campus experience	Authentic experiences of current EKP students regarding academic life and campus activities	2
Graduate career prospects	Employment opportunities and salary expectations for graduates in the government and private sectors	3
Total		12

Based on direct observation, the overall atmosphere of the session was positive and conducive to learning. Students demonstrated sustained engagement from the opening introduction through to the close of the Q&A session, with participation extending broadly across the cohort rather than being confined to a small number of vocal individuals. Several students subsequently expressed intentions to seek additional information about EKP through the official USK website and the program's social media platforms, suggesting that the activity's influence extended beyond the immediate session. The interactive presentation format of the session is illustrated in Figure 1, which shows the EKP team delivering the socialization material to the Grade XI Science students and the attentive engagement of participants throughout the delivery.



Figure 1. Presentation delivery by the EKP socialization team to 42 Grade XI Science students at MAN Model Banda Aceh, illustrating the interactive presentation format used throughout the session (May 20, 2026).

These findings align with prior research demonstrating that direct, face-to-face program

socialization is more effective than purely digital channels in building authentic program understanding and stimulating sustained student interest (Rahardja et al., 2021). The observed patterns are also consistent with Holland's theory (1997), which posits that providing clear information about program characteristics enables students to assess congruence with their own interests and abilities — a precondition for informed career choice. The peer-sharing dimension of this activity, wherein current EKP students served as facilitators and role models, aligns with social cognitive career theory (Savickas, 2013), which emphasizes the role of observational learning and direct interaction in shaping career interest formation.

The participatory, dialogue-based format of the activity reflects Freire's (2005) pedagogical principles: by positioning students as active participants rather than passive recipients, the session fostered critical engagement with program information and created space for students to articulate their genuine concerns and aspirations. This design contrasts with conventional, one-directional outreach formats and represents a distinctive methodological contribution of the present initiative. Mulyadi et al. (2022) similarly found that interactive socialization approaches produced stronger improvements in students' program knowledge and decision-making confidence compared to brochure-based or web-based information provision. These observations are consistent with a broader body of outreach research indicating that structured school–university engagement can raise the higher education aspirations of under-represented students (Banerjee et al., 2023) and is positively associated with their subsequent progression to higher education (Martin, 2024).

The activity also demonstrated benefits for both groups of participants. High school students gained access to accurate information that broadened their awareness of higher education options and supported more confident post-secondary planning. The EKP student facilitators, in turn, developed communication, leadership, and teamwork competencies through the practical experience of delivering complex information to a non-specialist audience and managing a live Q&A session. This reciprocity reflects the dual character of community service as an undertaking that simultaneously serves its beneficiaries and develops those who carry it out. This active, two-way engagement is depicted in Figure 2, which captures the discussion and question-and-answer session in which students raised their questions directly to the EKP facilitators, evidencing the participatory character of the peer-sharing approach.



Figure 2. Active discussion and Q&A session between Grade XI students and the EKP facilitation team, demonstrating high levels of participant engagement and the interactive character of the peer-sharing approach.

The achievement of the predefined success indicators is summarised in Table 4. Based on direct observation, all four indicators were met, indicating that the activity attained its intended outcomes within the scope of a qualitative evaluation.

Table 4. Achievement of the Activity's Success Indicators

Success Indicator	Target / Criterion	Achievement
Participant attendance and involvement	Invited Grade XI Science students attend and participate actively in the session	Achieved — all 42 invited students attended and participated throughout the session
Substantive questions raised	Students raise substantive questions spanning the main thematic areas	Achieved — 12 substantive questions raised across 4 thematic areas (see Table 3)
Breadth of participation	Engagement distributed broadly across the cohort rather than among a few individuals	Achieved — participation observed broadly across the cohort during discussion and Q&A
Information-seeking intention	Participants express intention to seek further information about the EKP program	Achieved — several students expressed intention to seek further information via official USK channels

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, this activity did not employ pre-test or post-test instruments; consequently, quantitative measurement of participants' knowledge change before and after the session was not possible, and the degree of learning improvement cannot be reported with precision. Second, the 30-minute session duration, constrained by the school's timetable, limited the depth to which all topic areas could be explored. Third, the activity was confined to a single school, which limits the generalizability of outcomes across the broader secondary school population. Notwithstanding these constraints, direct observation of engagement and the quality of student participation during discussion and Q&A collectively support the conclusion that the activity achieved its stated objectives.

CONCLUSION

This community service activity successfully delivered a participatory socialization of the Development Economics Study Program to 42 Grade XI Science students at MAN Model Banda Aceh on May 20, 2026. Based on direct observation and qualitative assessment, the activity generated high levels of participant engagement, substantive question-asking across four thematic areas, and expressed interest in seeking further information about EKP, collectively demonstrating a positive impact on students' educational literacy and career planning awareness. The peer-sharing, dialogue-based approach proved effective in engaging students and stimulating information-seeking behavior beyond the session itself. For future activities, it is recommended that: (1) pre-test and post-test instruments or structured questionnaires be incorporated to enable more objective and quantitative evaluation of participant learning outcomes; (2) session duration be extended to at least 60 minutes to allow more comprehensive content coverage; and (3) the socialization be expanded to additional secondary schools across Aceh Province to maximize equitable access to higher education information. The collegial atmosphere that characterised the activity is reflected in Figure 3,

a group photograph of the EKP facilitation team together with the Grade XI Science students taken following the conclusion of the session.



Figure 3. Group photograph of the EKP facilitation team and Grade XI Science students at MAN Model Banda Aceh following the conclusion of the socialization activity, reflecting a positive and collegial atmosphere throughout the session.

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