

Community-Based Academic Outreach for Enhancing Sociological Literacy among Senior High School Students in Eastern Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of a community-based academic outreach approach in enhancing sociological literacy among senior high school students in Eastern Indonesia, particularly in understanding the relevance of sociology to contemporary social realities. The research was motivated by students' limited understanding of social science disciplines and the continued dominance of administrative and non-participatory higher education outreach practices. A qualitative descriptive approach with a participatory community engagement paradigm was employed at SMAS Angkasa Pattimura Ambon. Research participants included twelfth-grade students, supervising teachers, and the sociology department's community service team. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, documentation, and participant reflections, and analyzed using an interactive thematic approach. The findings reveal that participatory academic outreach significantly improved students' understanding of sociological concepts, social inquiry, curriculum structures, and the academic and professional prospects of sociology. Students also demonstrated greater reflective capacity in interpreting social inequality, cultural change, social conflict, and digital social dynamics within their communities. Compared with conventional lecture-based socialization, the interactive model fostered stronger critical dialogue and active engagement. This study contributes a novel perspective by reconstructing academic outreach as a transformative instrument for strengthening sociological literacy and intellectual empowerment rather than merely institutional promotion within peripheral educational contexts.

Keywords: Academic Outreach, Community Engagement, Higher Education Socialization, Participatory Education, Sociological Literacy



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INTRODUCTION

The growing expansion of higher education access in developing societies has not always been accompanied by an equivalent expansion of academic understanding among prospective students. In many regions of Eastern Indonesia, students at the senior high school level continue to experience limited exposure to the intellectual foundations, disciplinary orientations, and societal relevance of university study programs. Educational outreach activities conducted by universities are frequently centered on institutional promotion, administrative procedures, and admission mechanisms rather than on cultivating substantive

academic literacy (Louise et al., 2025; Satria et al., 2023). As a consequence, many students construct their higher education aspirations based on social prestige, labor market assumptions, peer influence, or familial expectations instead of informed academic reflection. This condition becomes increasingly significant in the context of social sciences, particularly sociology, which is often perceived narrowly as a theoretical discipline with limited practical relevance despite its strategic role in understanding social transformation, inequality, conflict, cultural change, and contemporary civic life (Akbari et al., 2024; Wicaksono et al., 2023).

The issue of sociological literacy among adolescents deserves closer scholarly attention because young people today are situated within rapidly changing social environments shaped by digitalization, media saturation, economic uncertainty, identity politics, and shifting cultural values. Without adequate sociological understanding, students may encounter difficulties in critically interpreting social phenomena occurring around them, including polarization, misinformation, social exclusion, and changing community structures. Sulaiman (2024) emphasized that sociological imagination enables individuals to connect personal experiences with broader social structures, allowing them to interpret social realities critically and reflexively. In educational contexts, sociological literacy therefore extends beyond disciplinary knowledge; it becomes an intellectual capacity that strengthens civic awareness, empathy, and critical social reasoning (Korua et al., 2025; Wulanningtyas et al., 2025). However, this dimension remains insufficiently integrated into outreach practices directed toward pre-university students, particularly in peripheral regions where access to academic information and intellectual engagement remains uneven.

Indonesia's educational landscape reflects persistent disparities between metropolitan and peripheral regions in terms of academic exposure, educational infrastructure, and access to knowledge networks. While students in major urban centers are increasingly connected to academic resources through seminars, educational fairs, mentoring programs, and digital platforms, students in Eastern Indonesia often encounter structural limitations that reduce opportunities for direct engagement with higher education institutions. Several national educational reports have highlighted that educational inequality in Indonesia is not solely related to infrastructure but also concerns disparities in informational access and intellectual capital formation (Fidiyani et al., 2025; Wuryantari et al., 2026). In many schools located outside dominant urban regions, outreach activities remain ceremonial and one-directional, leaving little room for dialogue, critical engagement, or reflective learning. Consequently, students may become passive recipients of institutional information rather than active participants in the construction of educational aspirations.

Within this broader context, community-based academic outreach emerges as an important alternative approach capable of bridging universities and school communities through participatory educational engagement. Unlike conventional promotion-oriented outreach, community-based approaches position students as reflective subjects whose social experiences and local realities become central to the learning process. This perspective aligns with participatory education frameworks that emphasize dialogue, critical consciousness, and

collaborative knowledge production (Yanuarto et al., 2024; Yusuf, 2024). Educational outreach, therefore, should not merely introduce academic programs but also facilitate critical engagement with social realities that students encounter in their everyday lives. Such an approach becomes particularly relevant for sociology because the discipline itself is fundamentally concerned with examining how individuals interact with structures, institutions, and cultural transformations within society.

Previous studies have demonstrated that community engagement initiatives in higher education can contribute positively to educational empowerment and social inclusion. Service-learning and outreach programs have increasingly been recognized as mechanisms through which universities strengthen their social responsibility while simultaneously enriching student and community learning experiences (Andriana et al., 2024; Ramadlan & Aminuddin, 2025). Research by Nikmah & Rasyid (2023) and Syahputra et al. (2023) further argued that higher education institutions should move beyond the traditional boundaries of teaching and research toward a broader scholarship of engagement that connects academic knowledge with societal needs. In practice, however, many outreach initiatives remain focused on short-term informational dissemination rather than transformative intellectual interaction. This limitation is particularly visible in contexts where outreach activities are measured primarily through participation numbers instead of long-term educational impact.

Studies on educational outreach programs have also expanded substantially over the last decade, especially concerning widening participation and educational accessibility among underrepresented communities. Kusuma (2024) and Retnowulandari et al. (2024) found that outreach initiatives are effective when they create meaningful relationships between institutions and communities rather than functioning solely as recruitment strategies. Similarly, Al-Fatih (2024) and Kurniawan et al. (2023) emphasized that student engagement programs must address structural inequalities affecting educational aspirations, especially among marginalized populations. Outreach activities that encourage interaction, discussion, and contextual reflection tend to produce stronger educational outcomes than programs relying exclusively on formal presentations. Nevertheless, much of the existing literature remains concentrated on access to higher education rather than on the cultivation of disciplinary literacy and critical intellectual awareness.

Research concerning sociological literacy has likewise highlighted the importance of critical social understanding within educational processes. Sociological literacy enables individuals to recognize social patterns, power relations, and structural inequalities shaping everyday life (Ghaniy & Nopiah, 2025; Purbasari et al., 2025). Studies in sociology education indicate that exposure to sociological thinking contributes significantly to empathy development, democratic participation, and critical citizenship (Possumah, 2023; Wijangga & Latief, 2025). Educational environments that encourage students to question social assumptions and reflect upon their lived realities can foster deeper forms of intellectual engagement. Despite these insights, sociological literacy has rarely been discussed within the framework of community service or outreach activities directed toward secondary school

students. Existing scholarship predominantly situates sociological learning within formal university classrooms rather than within participatory community engagement contexts.

Another relevant strand of literature concerns peripheral and transitional societies in educational development. Scholars have increasingly noted that educational inequalities are deeply shaped by geographical marginalization and uneven distribution of institutional resources (Kuswanto et al., 2024; Sukman et al., 2025). Peripheral regions frequently experience exclusion from dominant academic networks, resulting in limited opportunities for intellectual mobility and academic exposure. Research in Southeast Asian educational contexts further demonstrates that students in non-metropolitan areas often possess lower familiarity with higher education systems and academic disciplines due to informational asymmetries and institutional distance (Kriswinahyu et al., 2025; Surata et al., 2025). In Eastern Indonesia specifically, educational discussions continue to focus heavily on infrastructure deficits and learning outcomes, while less attention has been given to how students construct academic identities and intellectual aspirations through interaction with universities.

Several Indonesian studies on community service activities have mainly focused on digital literacy training, entrepreneurship development, learning motivation, and teacher capacity building (Arifin, 2025b, 2025a). While these contributions remain important, relatively limited attention has been directed toward the role of academic outreach in strengthening critical social awareness among students. Likewise, university socialization programs are generally framed as institutional branding activities rather than as pedagogical spaces capable of facilitating intellectual empowerment. As a result, the transformative potential of outreach as a form of participatory sociological education remains underexplored. This becomes even more evident within peripheral educational settings where students' social realities are highly dynamic and deeply connected to issues of inequality, migration, cultural transition, and changing community structures.

Against this backdrop, the present study approaches academic outreach not simply as a communicative strategy for introducing university programs but as a dialogical process through which sociological literacy can be cultivated among senior high school students. Rather than positioning students as passive audiences, the study situates them as reflective participants capable of interpreting their own social environments critically. By integrating community engagement principles with sociological education, this research explores how outreach activities may contribute to the development of critical social awareness, educational orientation, and intellectual participation among youth in Eastern Indonesia. The study further pays attention to the importance of contextual learning, where discussions about sociology are connected directly to students' lived experiences, community interactions, digital environments, and local social transformations.

In doing so, the research offers an alternative perspective on higher education outreach by foregrounding sociological understanding as an essential component of educational empowerment. The participatory character of the outreach activities allows

students not only to receive information about sociology as an academic discipline but also to reflect upon social realities such as inequality, media influence, cultural change, and community relations within their own contexts. This orientation subtly repositions community service from a model of informational transfer toward a process of intellectual co-construction between universities and school communities. Such an approach becomes particularly meaningful in peripheral societies where educational engagement often requires sensitivity to local realities, social dynamics, and unequal access to academic resources.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of community-based academic outreach in enhancing sociological literacy among senior high school students in Eastern Indonesia. It further seeks to identify how participatory outreach activities shape students' understanding of sociology, academic aspirations, and critical interpretations of social life. At a broader level, the study intends to contribute to discussions on community engagement, sociology education, and educational development by demonstrating how outreach initiatives can function simultaneously as instruments of academic dissemination, social reflection, and intellectual empowerment within transitional and peripheral educational contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach within the framework of participatory community engagement to explore how community-based academic outreach contributes to the enhancement of sociological literacy among senior high school students in Eastern Indonesia. A qualitative design was considered the most appropriate because the study sought to understand students' perceptions, reflections, interpretations, and lived experiences during the outreach process rather than to measure outcomes statistically. The research was grounded in the assumption that sociological literacy develops through interaction, dialogue, and reflective engagement with social realities, all of which require interpretative exploration that cannot be fully captured through quantitative instruments. Qualitative inquiry also enables researchers to examine educational experiences contextually and holistically, particularly in settings characterized by diverse social and cultural dynamics (Priya, 2021; Vindrola-Padros & Johnson, 2020). Furthermore, the participatory orientation of this study aligns with community engagement principles that emphasize reciprocal learning between universities and communities rather than one-directional knowledge transfer (Nassaji, 2020).

The research was conducted at SMAS Angkasa Pattimura Ambon because the school represents an important educational setting within Eastern Indonesia where students encounter both growing educational aspirations and structural limitations related to academic access and exposure. The selection of the location was also based on contextual considerations. As a school situated within a peripheral and transitional social environment, the institution reflects broader educational realities experienced by many students in Eastern Indonesia, particularly regarding limited familiarity with university disciplines and restricted

opportunities for direct interaction with higher education institutions. Conducting the research in this setting allowed the study to examine how participatory outreach activities function within communities that are often positioned outside dominant academic networks. In addition, the school demonstrated openness toward collaborative educational activities involving universities and community-based learning initiatives, making it possible to establish a more dialogical and reflective engagement process.

The informants in this study consisted of 24 participants, including 18 twelfth-grade students, 3 teachers, and 3 members of the sociology outreach team from the university. The student participants were selected purposively because they were approaching the transition period from secondary education to higher education and therefore represented a group actively negotiating academic aspirations and future educational choices. Students were also chosen based on their willingness to participate actively in discussions and reflective activities during the outreach sessions. The teacher informants were included because they possessed direct knowledge regarding students' educational orientations, classroom interactions, and responses toward academic socialization programs conducted at the school. Meanwhile, the outreach team members were selected because they were directly involved in designing and facilitating the participatory learning activities, enabling the research to capture perspectives concerning the objectives, strategies, and challenges of the outreach implementation. Purposive sampling was applied to ensure that participants possessed relevant experiences and contextual understanding related to the focus of the study (Hendren et al., 2023; Stanley, 2023).

Data collection was conducted through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, documentation, and participant reflection notes. Participatory observation was employed because the study emphasized interactional dynamics and reflective engagement occurring during outreach activities. Through direct observation, researchers were able to examine how students responded to discussions, interacted with facilitators, and articulated their understanding of social issues within the learning process. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences, interpretations, and personal reflections more comprehensively, particularly regarding their understanding of sociology and higher education after participating in the outreach activities. Focus group discussions were utilized to encourage collective dialogue among students and to capture how social understanding emerged through peer interaction and shared reflection. This method was especially important because sociological literacy is often constructed socially through discussion and interpretative exchange (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Muurlink & Thomsen, 2024). Documentation, including photographs, activity records, presentation materials, and students' reflective writings, was collected to strengthen contextual interpretation and provide additional evidence regarding the implementation process.

Data analysis followed the interactive model developed by Lim (2025), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis process was conducted

continuously throughout the research to identify emerging themes related to sociological understanding, critical awareness, and educational orientation among participants. To ensure data credibility and trustworthiness, triangulation was conducted through multiple strategies. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing perspectives from students, teachers, and outreach facilitators, while method triangulation involved comparing findings obtained from observations, interviews, focus group discussions, and documentation. The study also applied member checking by inviting participants to review several interpretations and preliminary findings to ensure that the analysis accurately represented their experiences and perspectives. In addition, peer debriefing with fellow researchers was undertaken to minimize subjective bias and strengthen analytical rigor.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Reframing Academic Outreach Beyond Institutional Promotion

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of community-based academic outreach at SMAS Angkasa Pattimura Ambon gradually shifted students' perceptions of university socialization activities from being merely administrative events into spaces of intellectual dialogue and social reflection. Prior to the outreach program, most student participants associated higher education promotion with formal presentations dominated by information about admission procedures, tuition fees, and institutional branding. During the initial focus group discussions, several students described previous outreach experiences as "monotonous," "too formal," and "mostly about registration." One participant, identified as R., explained that university visits to schools generally focused on "how to enter campus, not how to understand what we actually want to study." Similar responses emerged from participatory observations, where students initially demonstrated passive engagement and limited interaction during introductory sessions. These findings reflect broader tendencies in educational outreach practices that often prioritize institutional dissemination over intellectual engagement (Darmawanto et al., 2025; Mutmainah, 2024).



Figure 1 Sociology Program Outreach Activity in the classroom of SMAS Angkasa Pattimura Ambon

Source: Research documentation (2026)

However, the dynamics began to change as the outreach activities adopted a participatory and dialogical approach. Instead of positioning students as passive recipients of information, the sessions encouraged them to discuss social realities surrounding their everyday lives, including online social interaction, educational inequality, cultural transformation, and changing youth identities in contemporary society. Through facilitated discussions and reflective group conversations, students were invited to connect these issues with sociological perspectives and concepts introduced during the outreach process. This shift created a learning atmosphere that felt less hierarchical and more conversational. Observational data showed that students who initially remained silent gradually became more willing to express opinions, ask questions, and relate sociological discussions to personal experiences within their families and communities.

The transformation of the outreach atmosphere was particularly visible during interactive dialogue sessions in which students were encouraged to interpret social phenomena collectively rather than simply receive explanations from facilitators. One student participant, coded as A.L., stated during an interview that the activity “felt different because we were not only listening, but also discussing problems that actually happen around us.” Another participant, M.S., reflected that sociology became easier to understand when discussions were connected to “real situations in Ambon, social media conflicts, and differences between communities.” These responses demonstrate that students became more engaged when academic knowledge was contextualized within their lived realities. In this sense, the outreach activities functioned not merely as channels for transferring institutional information but as spaces where knowledge was negotiated collaboratively through dialogue and reflection.

The participatory character of the outreach also contributed to the emergence of a more egalitarian relationship between university representatives and students. Unlike conventional outreach models that tend to reinforce symbolic distance between higher education institutions and school communities, the activities in this study emphasized reciprocal interaction and shared learning experiences. Facilitators intentionally avoided formal lecture-centered delivery and instead positioned themselves as discussion partners who listened to students’ perspectives and encouraged open conversation. Teachers involved in the program observed noticeable differences in students’ responses compared to previous university socialization events. One teacher informant, identified as H.T., explained that students appeared “more emotionally connected and intellectually curious” because the sessions allowed them to speak about their own social experiences rather than simply receive institutional explanations.

This finding is significant because it illustrates how academic outreach can evolve into a form of community-centered intellectual engagement. The outreach process did not only introduce sociology as an academic discipline but also enabled students to see themselves as active interpreters of social life. Such a transformation aligns closely with the principles of engaged pedagogy, which emphasizes participation, dialogue, and the co-construction of

knowledge between educators and learners (Mukhlisin et al., 2024; Permatasari et al., 2025; Siregar et al., 2023). Within this perspective, learning becomes meaningful when participants are recognized as subjects with experiences, voices, and social realities that deserve to be acknowledged within educational processes. The findings further resonate with Irrubai et al. (2024) and Malika (2024) concept of critical participatory engagement, which argues that community engagement initiatives should move beyond informational outreach toward collaborative forms of knowledge production capable of fostering critical awareness and social empowerment.

The transition from institution-centered dissemination to community-centered engagement was also reflected in the emotional atmosphere of the activities. Students repeatedly expressed that the outreach sessions felt “closer,” “more open,” and “more relevant” compared to conventional socialization programs. Rather than perceiving the university as a distant institution accessible only to certain social groups, participants began to see higher education as a social partner capable of understanding and engaging with their realities. This relational dimension became particularly important within the context of Eastern Indonesia, where students often experience limited direct interaction with universities and academic communities. The outreach activities therefore reduced not only informational barriers but also symbolic and psychological distance between students and higher education institutions.

Strengthening Sociological Literacy Through Participatory Learning

One of the most significant findings of this study lies in the strengthening of students' sociological literacy through participatory learning processes embedded within the community-based academic outreach activities at SMAS Angkasa Pattimura Ambon. Prior to participating in the program, most students demonstrated a relatively limited understanding of sociology, often associating the discipline merely with the study of society in general terms. During the initial interviews and focus group discussions, several participants admitted that they previously viewed sociology as a theoretical subject with unclear practical relevance. One student participant, identified as D.R., explained that sociology had initially seemed “too abstract and mostly about memorizing concepts.” Similar responses emerged from reflective notes collected at the beginning of the outreach process, where students tended to define sociology narrowly as a school subject rather than as a way of understanding social realities surrounding their everyday lives.

As the outreach activities progressed, however, students began to demonstrate substantial shifts in their understanding of sociology and its relevance to contemporary social issues. Through participatory discussions, contextual case studies, and reflective dialogue sessions, students were encouraged to relate sociological concepts to their lived experiences within families, peer groups, digital environments, and local communities. Rather than relying on lecture-centered delivery, facilitators invited participants to discuss concrete issues such as online hate speech, youth identity formation on social media, educational inequality, cultural transformation, and tensions emerging from social diversity in their surroundings.

This contextual approach enabled students to perceive sociology not simply as an academic discipline but as an interpretative framework for understanding the complexities of social life.

Observational data revealed that students became increasingly active in articulating opinions and connecting personal experiences with broader structural conditions. During one discussion session concerning educational inequality, several participants reflected on differences in educational access between urban regions and Eastern Indonesia. A student coded as F.M. stated that “we often think inequality only happens in big cities, but actually we also feel differences here, especially in access to information and opportunities.” Another participant, S.K., connected discussions about social media with changing youth behavior, explaining that “many conflicts among teenagers now begin online, but we rarely think about why people react differently in social media spaces.” These reflections indicate that students gradually developed the ability to move beyond surface-level observations toward more critical interpretations of social phenomena.

The findings further suggest that participatory learning processes played an important role in fostering critical social awareness among students. Discussions were intentionally designed to encourage reflection rather than passive acceptance of information. Facilitators frequently used open-ended questions and locally relevant examples to stimulate analytical thinking and collective interpretation. This approach created opportunities for students to examine how social structures, cultural norms, and institutional conditions shape individual experiences. As one participant, coded as N.L., expressed during an interview, “before this activity, I thought social problems were just personal matters, but now I realize there are bigger social factors behind them.” Such reflections illustrate an emerging sociological imagination in which students begin to connect personal experiences with wider societal processes, a core dimension of sociological literacy itself (Alimin et al., 2024; Wulandari et al., 2023).

The use of local case studies also contributed significantly to the accessibility of sociological concepts. Instead of discussing distant or overly abstract examples, the outreach activities incorporated issues familiar to students’ everyday realities in Ambon and surrounding communities. Conversations regarding cultural coexistence, youth interaction across social groups, and the influence of digital culture enabled students to engage more emotionally and intellectually with the material. Teachers participating in the program observed that students appeared more enthusiastic when discussions reflected their own social environments. One teacher informant, identified as H.R., noted that students “became more expressive because they felt the discussion was truly connected to their lives, not just textbook theories.” This contextual engagement strengthened students’ confidence in expressing ideas and interpreting social conditions critically.

Importantly, the findings demonstrate that sociological literacy within this outreach framework extended beyond cognitive understanding of sociological terminology. Students began to exhibit reflective and interpretative capacities that allowed them to question assumptions, recognize patterns of inequality, and understand the relational dimensions of

social life. In several reflective writings collected after the outreach sessions, participants emphasized that they had become more aware of how social environments influence attitudes, opportunities, and interactions among individuals. Some students also acknowledged that sociology helped them understand diversity and social difference more empathetically. These developments suggest that sociological literacy functions not only as academic knowledge acquisition but also as a form of critical social consciousness.

This interpretation aligns closely with Ahleyani et al. (2025) and Kadir et al. (2023) concept of critical social literacy, which emphasizes that reflective education should encourage learners to interrogate social realities, challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, and develop awareness of structural dimensions shaping everyday experiences. Within this perspective, learning becomes transformative when students are enabled to critically interpret the social world rather than merely absorb information passively. The findings of this study demonstrate that participatory outreach activities can facilitate such transformative learning processes, particularly when educational discussions are grounded in contextual realities familiar to students.

Interactive Outreach as a Medium for Critical Social Reflection

The findings of this study demonstrate that the interactive approach implemented within the community-based academic outreach activities created a substantially different educational atmosphere compared to conventional lecture-oriented university socialization programs. At SMAS Angkasa Pattimura Ambon, students showed significantly higher levels of participation when outreach sessions were conducted through open dialogue, collaborative reflection, social simulation, and contextual discussion rather than through one-directional presentations. Observational data collected during the outreach process indicated that students responded more actively when facilitators encouraged them to share opinions, question social phenomena, and discuss experiences emerging from their own social environments. This participatory dynamic gradually transformed the outreach sessions into spaces of collective reflection rather than formal academic dissemination.

During the initial phase of the activities, several students appeared hesitant to speak openly, largely because previous outreach experiences had conditioned them to function as passive audiences. However, as facilitators introduced interactive discussions concerning issues closely related to students' daily realities, participation increased considerably. Discussions about social media behavior, changing youth culture, educational inequality, and family relations generated spontaneous responses from participants who previously remained silent during formal sessions. One student participant, identified as R.T., explained during an interview that "usually we only listen when universities come to school, but this time we were asked what we think about problems around us." This seemingly simple shift in interactional structure had important implications for how students positioned themselves within the learning process.

The outreach activities also revealed that students were more willing to engage critically when sociological discussions were connected to familiar social experiences. During

a group reflection session concerning digital culture, several participants discussed how social media pressures shape youth identity and interpersonal relations. A participant coded as M.L. reflected that “many teenagers now feel pressured to appear perfect online, and it affects how we see ourselves and others.” Another student, F.S., connected online interaction with conflict escalation among peers, explaining that “small misunderstandings in social media can quickly become bigger because people react emotionally without understanding each other.” These discussions illustrate how the interactive outreach model encouraged students not only to express opinions but also to analyze the social dimensions underlying everyday interactions.

The use of reflective group discussions further strengthened students’ engagement with sociological perspectives. Facilitators frequently invited participants to interpret local social realities collectively, including issues related to cultural diversity, inequality in educational opportunities, and changing family dynamics. Rather than providing definitive answers, facilitators positioned questions as openings for reflection and dialogue. This approach enabled students to recognize that social problems are often shaped by broader structural and cultural conditions rather than merely individual behavior. One participant, identified as A.K., stated that “I started realizing that many social issues are connected to how society works, not only because people make mistakes.” Such reflections suggest that students were beginning to develop a more analytical understanding of social relations and structures through participatory interaction.

Importantly, the interactive character of the outreach activities created emotional and intellectual conditions that encouraged students to feel heard and valued within the educational process. Several participants expressed that they appreciated the opportunity to discuss their perspectives openly without fear of being judged. Teachers involved in the program also observed notable differences in students’ attitudes compared to previous formal outreach activities. One teacher informant, coded as Y.H., explained that students appeared “more confident and emotionally engaged because the discussions allowed them to connect academic topics with their own experiences.” This finding highlights the relational dimension of participatory outreach, where interaction itself becomes part of the learning process rather than merely a medium for information delivery.

The effectiveness of the interactive approach can also be understood through the emergence of reflective social awareness among students. Discussions frequently moved beyond academic topics toward deeper conversations about inequality, social pressure, intergroup relations, and cultural change within their communities. Students not only discussed these issues descriptively but also attempted to interpret why such phenomena occur and how they influence social relationships. This process reflects what Putri & Lase (2025) and Torres-Rivera et al. (2025) conceptualized as dialogical learning, in which critical awareness develops through collective reflection and reciprocal communication rather than passive reception of knowledge. In the context of this study, outreach activities functioned as dialogical spaces where sociological understanding emerged through interaction,

questioning, and shared interpretation.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that the interactive outreach model enabled sociology to be perceived as relevant and applicable to contemporary social realities. Students no longer viewed sociology solely as a school subject or university major but as a framework for understanding social experiences occurring around them. This transformation was particularly visible in students' reflective notes, where many participants emphasized that sociology helped them think more critically about relationships, community dynamics, and social media influences. Such outcomes support the argument that participatory educational engagement can foster deeper forms of intellectual involvement than conventional lecture-based approaches (Juhaidi, 2024).

Academic Outreach and Educational Awareness in Peripheral Society

The findings of this study reveal that the implementation of community-based academic outreach in SMAS Angkasa Pattimura Ambon cannot be separated from the broader realities of Eastern Indonesia as a peripheral educational context characterized by unequal access to academic information, limited interaction with higher education institutions, and restricted exposure to intellectual networks. Prior to participating in the outreach activities, many students demonstrated relatively narrow understandings of university life and academic disciplines. Interviews conducted during the initial stage of the research indicated that students' educational orientations were often shaped by fragmented information obtained from social media, peer conversations, or family expectations rather than from substantive academic engagement. Several participants admitted that they had limited opportunities to interact directly with university representatives outside formal promotional events. One participant, identified as J.R., explained that "usually we only hear about universities from the internet or from relatives, but not directly from lecturers or academic discussions." This condition reflects how informational inequality remains an important dimension of educational disparity in peripheral societies (Hasibuan, 2025).

Geographical distance and uneven educational infrastructure also appeared to influence how students imagined higher education itself. During focus group discussions, some participants described universities as distant institutions associated primarily with urban centers and economic privilege. Students frequently perceived academic disciplines in instrumental terms, focusing mainly on employment prospects rather than intellectual or social relevance. Such perceptions are understandable within contexts where educational access is often intertwined with economic limitations, infrastructural inequality, and restricted exposure to broader academic cultures. Afdhal (2023) argues that peripheral educational contexts frequently experience symbolic exclusion from dominant knowledge systems, resulting in unequal opportunities for intellectual participation. The findings of this study resonate strongly with this perspective, particularly in relation to how students initially positioned themselves in relation to higher education institutions.

However, the outreach activities gradually altered these perceptions by creating more direct, dialogical, and humanistic interactions between the university and the school

community. Through participatory discussions, reflective sessions, and contextual sociological conversations, students began to experience the university not merely as a formal institution but as an accessible social partner capable of engaging with their realities and aspirations. This transformation became particularly visible during interview sessions conducted after the outreach activities. One participant, coded as M.T., stated that “before this program, university felt far away from us, but now it feels more open and connected to our lives.” Another student, A.S., reflected that the outreach activities made higher education appear “less intimidating because the discussions were about our own experiences and communities.” These responses indicate that the outreach process reduced not only informational barriers but also symbolic distance between students and academic institutions.

The participatory approach employed during the outreach activities played a crucial role in bridging this symbolic divide. Rather than emphasizing institutional prestige or administrative procedures, facilitators encouraged students to discuss social issues emerging within their own environments, including educational inequality, youth culture, social media pressures, and changing community relations. This contextual engagement enabled students to perceive academic knowledge as something relevant and meaningful rather than distant and abstract. Observational findings further demonstrated that students became more confident in expressing opinions and asking questions as the sessions progressed. Teachers participating in the program also noted that students appeared more enthusiastic because they felt included within the educational dialogue. One teacher informant, identified as Y.L., explained that “students usually become passive during university presentations, but this activity made them feel involved and respected.”

These findings suggest that academic outreach within peripheral educational settings possesses significance beyond conventional institutional socialization. The outreach activities functioned as mechanisms for redistributing academic knowledge to groups that are often positioned outside dominant centers of knowledge production. In this context, the university’s role extended beyond disseminating information toward facilitating intellectual inclusion and educational empowerment. Students were not treated merely as potential applicants but as young individuals capable of reflecting critically upon social realities and educational futures. Such an approach aligns with recent discussions concerning educational inclusion and knowledge democratization in transitional societies, where equitable access to intellectual engagement becomes increasingly important (Litaay et al., 2025; Wali & Afdhal, 2024).

The findings also highlight the importance of contextual sensitivity within community engagement initiatives in peripheral regions. Educational outreach cannot simply replicate urban-centered approaches without considering local social realities, cultural experiences, and informational limitations. In the case of Eastern Indonesia, participatory dialogue proved effective because it acknowledged students’ lived experiences and positioned local realities as legitimate starting points for academic discussion. This orientation allowed students to

recognize that higher education is not disconnected from their communities but can instead become a resource for understanding and responding to social change within their own environments.

Toward a Transformative Model of Community-Based Academic Outreach

The overall findings of this study indicate that the implementation of community-based academic outreach at SMAS Angkasa Pattimura Ambon has generated a more participatory, reflective, and transformative form of community engagement compared to conventional models of university socialization. Rather than functioning solely as an institutional communication strategy, the outreach activities evolved into a dialogical educational process that connected sociological learning, community realities, and students' academic aspirations. The integration of participatory discussion, contextual reflection, and social interaction created an educational environment in which students were encouraged not only to receive information but also to interpret, question, and critically engage with the social realities surrounding their lives. This transformation became visible throughout the research process, particularly in the ways students articulated new understandings of sociology, higher education, and their own positions within changing social contexts.

One of the central characteristics of the outreach model developed in this study was its emphasis on relational and collaborative learning. Facilitators did not position themselves as authoritative transmitters of knowledge but instead acted as discussion partners who encouraged reciprocal interaction with students. This approach altered the social dynamics typically found in university outreach activities, which are often formal, hierarchical, and heavily focused on institutional promotion. During interviews and reflective discussions, students repeatedly emphasized that the activities felt more meaningful because they were invited to express experiences and concerns related to their communities, educational futures, and social environments. One participant, identified as D.L., explained that "this activity was different because we were not only told about university, but also asked to think about society and ourselves." Another participant, coded as R.K., reflected that sociology became "more alive" when discussions were connected to local social realities rather than abstract theoretical explanations.

The findings suggest that the participatory outreach process simultaneously strengthened sociological literacy and educational awareness among students. Rather than separating academic information from social reflection, the outreach activities integrated both dimensions into a single educational experience. Discussions concerning inequality, social media, youth identity, and cultural change enabled students to develop broader perspectives regarding the relationship between personal experiences and structural social conditions. In this sense, academic orientation emerged not merely as a matter of choosing a university program but also as part of a deeper intellectual process through which students reconsidered their roles within society. This aligns with Maspaitella & Afdhal (2024) argument that transformative education requires learners to critically examine social assumptions while situating personal experiences within wider social structures.

Importantly, the study also demonstrates that community engagement initiatives grounded in social science perspectives possess strong potential to contribute to intellectual empowerment within peripheral educational settings. In Eastern Indonesia, where students often experience unequal access to academic resources and direct interaction with higher education institutions, outreach activities that prioritize dialogue and contextual understanding can reduce symbolic barriers between universities and local communities. Several student participants described the university differently after the outreach sessions, perceiving it less as a distant institution and more as a social partner capable of understanding their realities and aspirations. One student, identified as A.T., stated during an interview that “before this program, university felt like something only for certain people, but now it feels closer to us.” Such reflections illustrate how participatory engagement can reshape educational perceptions and foster stronger intellectual inclusion among students in peripheral contexts.

The transformative dimension of the outreach model also emerged from its ability to create reflective learning spaces that connected academic knowledge with everyday social experiences. Rather than emphasizing memorization or institutional prestige, the activities encouraged students to analyze social phenomena collectively and critically. Observational data showed that students became increasingly confident in articulating opinions, questioning social norms, and discussing issues affecting their communities. Teachers involved in the outreach process similarly observed that students demonstrated higher levels of curiosity and engagement compared to conventional academic socialization activities. One teacher informant, coded as H.S., explained that students “began to see education not only as preparation for work, but also as a way to understand society more deeply.” This shift reflects a broader transformation in educational orientation, where learning becomes connected to critical awareness and social understanding.

Conceptually, the findings of this study point toward the formulation of a transformative model of community-based academic outreach in which universities function simultaneously as educational institutions and agents of social empowerment. Within this model, outreach activities are not limited to disseminating information about academic programs but also contribute to the development of sociological literacy, critical reflection, and intellectual participation among young people. Community engagement therefore becomes a process of co-constructing knowledge through dialogue, contextual learning, and participatory interaction. This perspective resonates with recent discussions on transformative community engagement, which emphasize that universities should cultivate reciprocal relationships with communities rather than merely extending institutional influence outward (Pattiasina & Afdhal, 2022).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that community-based academic outreach implemented through participatory and dialogical approaches can effectively strengthen sociological

literacy among senior high school students in Eastern Indonesia by enabling them to understand sociology not merely as an academic discipline, but as a critical framework for interpreting contemporary social realities. The findings indicate that participatory interaction, reflective discussion, and contextual learning encourage students to connect personal experiences with broader social structures, thereby fostering greater critical awareness regarding issues such as inequality, cultural transformation, social relations, and digital interaction within their communities. In addition, the study reveals that outreach activities designed through community engagement principles are more effective than conventional lecture-based socialization because they position students as active participants in the learning process rather than passive recipients of institutional information. Within the context of peripheral educational settings, the outreach activities also contributed to reducing symbolic and informational distance between universities and school communities, allowing higher education institutions to be perceived not only as formal educational spaces but also as social partners in intellectual empowerment. Consequently, this study offers an alternative perspective on academic outreach by demonstrating that university community engagement grounded in social science education can function simultaneously as a medium for educational inclusion, critical social reflection, and the strengthening of sociological literacy among young people in developing and transitional societies.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants' confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors express their gratitude to the informants for their valuable insights, and to the anonymous reviewers for their constructive feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content and conclusions of this article.

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