



Improving The Quality of Education Through Healthy Optimization and Literacy Association

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Abstract The quality of education is not solely determined by academic aspects, but is also influenced by the social and cultural environment of students' literacy. Low interest in reading and suboptimal positive social interactions among adolescents pose challenges that can hinder the development of critical thinking skills, character, and academic achievement. This community service activity aims to increase students' understanding of the importance of healthy social interactions and literacy as supporting factors for quality education. The activity was carried out at SMP Negeri 31 Medan through socialization, interactive discussions, educational games, and group mentoring for eighth-grade students. A qualitative approach was used, using simple observation and interview techniques to identify students literacy levels prior to the activity. The results showed that students reading interest was still relatively low, especially in grades VIII-2 and VIII-3. Most students also found reading activities uninteresting and did not yet understand literacy concepts comprehensively. After the outreach activities, students demonstrated an increased understanding of the importance of literacy and positive social interactions in supporting academic success. This activity proves that the integration of literacy education and the creation of a healthy social environment can be an effective strategy in supporting the improvement of the quality of education at the secondary school level.

Keywords: Literacy, Healthy social interactions, Quality education, Community service, Junior high school student



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INTRODUCTION

Education is the primary foundation for developing high-quality and competitive human resources (Silaban et al., 2020). Through education, individuals not only acquire academic knowledge and skills but also develop character, moral values, social skills, and critical thinking skills needed to face life's challenges (Silaban et al., 2021). In the era of rapidly developing globalization and digital transformation, the quality of education is a determining factor in a nation's progress (Silaban et al., 2021). Therefore, various efforts are needed to create an educational environment that supports the holistic development of students, including cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects (Sirait et al., 2023).

One important indicator in achieving quality education is students' literacy skills. Literacy is no longer defined solely as the ability to read and write, but also encompasses the ability to understand, analyze, evaluate, and utilize information critically and responsibly (Sirait et al., 2021). Good literacy skills enable students to access various sources of knowledge, enhance critical thinking skills, and develop creativity in solving various problems (Harita et al., 2025). Amid the rapid flow of digital information, literacy is an essential skill that young people must possess to be able to sort out valid information, avoid the spread of misinformation, and utilize technology productively (Silaen et al., 2025).

Besides literacy, another factor that influences the quality of education is students' social environment. Social interactions play a crucial role in shaping students' character, attitudes, and behavior (R. Silaban, Riris, et al., 2025). A positive social environment can encourage students to have high learning motivation, increase self-confidence, strengthen communication skills, and foster an attitude of mutual respect and cooperation (Silaban et al., 2024). Conversely, an unhealthy social environment has the potential to give rise to various negative behaviors that can hinder students' academic and social development (M. M. Siahaan et al., 2026). Therefore, the formation of a healthy social culture in the school environment is one aspect that requires serious attention from various parties (Pardede et al., 2025).

The development of information technology and social media in the current digital era presents both opportunities and challenges in education. Easy access to information allows students to acquire knowledge from various sources without the constraints of space and time (Pardede et al., 2025). However, uncontrolled use of technology can also result in a decline in reading interest, reduced direct social interaction, and an increased tendency for students to spend time on less productive digital activities (Pardede et al., 2024). This phenomenon poses a significant challenge to the development of literacy among adolescents (Pane et al., 2025). Many students are more interested in accessing entertainment content through social media than reading books or other learning resources that can support their academic development (Pardede et al., 2024).

This situation was also found at SMP Negeri 31 Medan. Based on initial observations and interviews conducted by the community service team, it was found that students' reading interest was still relatively low, especially in some eighth-grade classes. Most students admitted to rarely reading books outside of classroom learning needs. Furthermore, some students considered reading boring and less engaging than

using social media or digital games. The identification results also showed that some students still lacked a comprehensive understanding of the concept of literacy, so literacy was viewed solely as the ability to read without understanding its function and benefits in everyday life. These findings demonstrate the need to increase students' awareness and understanding of the importance of literacy as a key asset in the learning process and self-development (Sitinjak et al., 2024).

On the other hand, students' social interactions are also a crucial concern in efforts to improve the quality of education. Adolescence is a phase of self-discovery that is heavily influenced by the surrounding social environment (Alexander et al., 2024). At this stage, peers have a significant influence on students' mindsets, behaviors, and habits (Sirait et al., 2024). When students are surrounded by a positive social environment, they tend to be more motivated to learn and develop their potential (Alexander, Siregar, et al., 2025). Conversely, unhealthy social interactions can lead students to engage in behaviors that are detrimental to academic development or character development (Simatupang et al., 2025). Therefore, strengthening understanding of the importance of choosing a healthy social environment needs to be carried out continuously as part of efforts to build a generation with character and integrity (Silaban et al., 2024).

Based on these issues, educational activities are needed to raise students' awareness of the importance of literacy and healthy social interactions in supporting educational success (Sirait et al., 2025). One form of effort that can be done is through community service activities that involve students as agents of change in the educational environment (Samosir et al., 2026). Through outreach activities, interactive discussions, educational games, and mentoring, students are expected to gain a better understanding of the benefits of literacy and the importance of building positive social relationships (Siahaan et al., 2023). A participatory and enjoyable approach is also expected to increase student involvement in learning activities so that the messages conveyed can be received more effectively (L. Pardede et al., 2026).

This activity aims to increase students' understanding of the importance of a culture of literacy and a positive social environment as supporting factors for successful learning. Furthermore, this activity is expected to be the first step in building a more conducive, inclusive school culture oriented toward the sustainable development of students' character and literacy skills. By increasing students' awareness of these two aspects, it is hoped that the quality of learning and education in the school environment will continue to improve (Alexander et al., 2026).

METHOD

Community service activities were carried out at SMP Negeri 31 Medan on October 19, 2025, targeting eighth-grade students. The method used was a participatory qualitative method through socialization and education activities (Susanti et al., 2025).

The stages of activity implementation:

1. Preparation
 - Coordination with the school
 - Preparation of outreach materials on literacy and healthy social interactions
 - Preparation of simple observation and interview instruments.
2. Problem Identification

- Observation of student conditions
 - Short interviews regarding reading habits, literacy understanding, and social patterns.
3. Implementation of Socialization
 - Presentation of material using presentation media
 - Interactive discussions with students
 - Ice breaking and educational group games to strengthen understanding of cooperation, communication, and literacy.
 4. Evaluation
 - Reflection with students.
 - Analysis of interview results and observations during the activity.

The data were analyzed descriptively to describe the condition of student literacy and the effectiveness of the socialization activities carried out (Pasaribu et al., 2024).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Student Literacy Conditions

The community service activity began with identifying student literacy conditions through interviews and observations of eighth-grade students at SMP Negeri 31 Medan. The identification results indicated that literacy culture in the school environment still faces various challenges that require serious attention from all education stakeholders.

Data shows that the percentage of students interested in reading books is still relatively low. In grades VIII-1, only around 50% of students reported an interest in reading, while in grades VIII-2 and VIII-3, the percentages dropped to 30% and 10%, respectively. These findings indicate that reading has not yet become a habitual part of most students' daily lives. This low interest in reading has the potential to impact students' ability to understand learning materials, broaden their horizons, and develop critical thinking skills.

Further interviews revealed that most students spend more of their free time using smartphones, accessing social media, watching videos, or playing online games than reading books. This situation aligns with a common phenomenon among today's digital generation, where access to technology-based entertainment is more appealing to teenagers than conventional literacy activities. As a result, students tend to acquire information instantly without engaging in in-depth reading and analysis

In addition to low reading interest, a high percentage of students were also found to have little interest in reading activities. In grades VIII-2, 60% of students reported having little interest in reading books, while in grades VIII-3, that figure reached 80%. This high percentage indicates that a reading culture has not yet developed optimally and that various strategies are still needed to foster literacy habits in the school environment.

Low reading interest can be influenced by various factors, both internal and external. Internal factors include low reading motivation, lack of early reading habits, and minimal awareness of the benefits of reading. Meanwhile, external factors include limited access to engaging reading materials, lack of family support, and the predominant use of digital technology for entertainment. Therefore, efforts to improve

literacy need to be comprehensive, involving schools, families, and the community (Alexander et al., 2025).

Another interesting finding was student's negative perceptions of reading. Sixty percent of students in grades VIII-2 and 50% of students in grades VIII-3 stated that books were a less engaging and often boring learning medium. Some students felt that reading took a long time and didn't provide the same level of entertainment as the digital content they consumed daily.

This perception indicates that the literacy approach implemented so far has not been fully able to attract student interest. Therefore, innovation is needed in the provision of reading materials and literacy-based learning strategies (Saragih et al., 2025). The use of books that are suited to student interests, the use of educational digital media, interactive reading activities, and group discussions can be alternatives to increase student engagement in literacy activities (Sitorus et al., 2025).



Figure 1 : PKM activities

Understanding Student Literacy

In addition to measuring reading interest, this community service activity also identified students' level of understanding of literacy concepts. Interview results indicated that some students still lack a comprehensive understanding of literacy. The percentage of students who did not understand the concept of literacy reached 33.33% in grades VIII-1, 40% in grades VIII-2, and 60% in grades VIII-3.

These findings indicate that most students still view literacy solely as the ability to read and write. In fact, literacy is a broader skill, encompassing the skills of understanding, interpreting, evaluating, and utilizing information to solve various problems in everyday life.

A lack of understanding of literacy concepts can impact students' critical thinking skills. When students simply read without understanding and analyzing the information they receive, the learning process will not produce in-depth understanding. Therefore, strengthening literacy needs to be directed not only at improving reading skills but also at developing critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and decision-making skills (Sinaga et al., 2024).

These findings demonstrate the importance of more comprehensive literacy education for secondary school students. Literacy needs to be introduced as a life skill that can help students face the increasingly complex academic and social challenges of the digital age (Alexander et al., 2025).

Implementation of Socialization of Healthy Social Relationships and Literacy

To address the identified issues, the community service team conducted outreach activities on the importance of healthy social interactions and literacy for students. These activities included presentations, interactive discussions, Q&A sessions, and educational games that actively engaged all participants.

The material presented covered the importance of developing a reading habit, the benefits of literacy in everyday life, the positive and negative impacts of social media use, and the importance of choosing a social environment that supports academic and character development. The material was delivered in simple and communicative language to ensure students' understanding.

One method that received a positive response from participants was the use of group games and icebreakers. Through these activities, students not only gained theoretical information but also experienced firsthand the importance of cooperation, effective communication, and the ability to understand instructions and information. This fun learning approach has been shown to increase student enthusiasm throughout the activity.

Group discussions also provide students with the opportunity to express their opinions, experiences, and perspectives regarding reading habits and the influence of their social environment on daily life (Sinurat et al., 2026). These interactions help students understand that learning success is influenced not only by academic ability but also by a supportive social environment and good study habits (Sinaga et al., 2026).

Impact of Activities on Participants

The implementation of the community service program demonstrated various positive impacts on participants. Throughout the activity, students actively participated in discussion sessions, answered questions, and participated in educational games. This enthusiasm demonstrated that participatory learning methods can increase student engagement in the educational process. Overall, this activity successfully improved students' understanding of the concept of literacy and the benefits of reading as a means of acquiring knowledge. Students also began to understand that literacy is not only about reading books, but also the ability to understand information and use it wisely in everyday life.

Furthermore, students' awareness of the importance of choosing a healthy social environment has increased. Through various case studies presented during the socialization, students gained an understanding of the positive impacts of social interactions that support academic achievement and the risks that can arise from unhealthy social interactions. This awareness is expected to help students make wiser decisions when interacting with peers.

Community service activities also successfully created a more active, communicative, and enjoyable learning environment. The use of educational games provided a different learning experience than conventional teaching, making it easier for students to understand the material presented. This demonstrates that a creative learning approach can be an effective strategy for increasing student interest and participation (Sibarani et al., 2023).

Overall, the results of these activities indicate that strengthening literacy and fostering healthy social interactions are two interrelated aspects in supporting improvements in the quality of education (Putri, 2023). Good literacy will help students

develop critical thinking skills and broaden their horizons, while a positive social environment will shape character and create a conducive learning climate (Silaban et al., 2025). Therefore, similar programs need to be implemented sustainably, involving schools, families, and the community to achieve optimal and sustainable impacts (Sirait, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Community service activities conducted at SMP Negeri 31 Medan successfully provided education on the importance of literacy and healthy social interactions as a support for quality education. Identification results indicated that students' interest in reading remains low, some consider reading a less engaging activity, and their understanding of literacy concepts remains limited.

Through outreach activities, discussions, and educational games, students gain a better understanding of the benefits of literacy and the importance of building a positive social environment. Therefore, strengthening a culture of literacy and character building through healthy social interactions requires a sustainable approach, involving schools, teachers, parents, and students as key partners in achieving quality education.

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